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ROBIN GRAY.

A NOVEL.

ROBIN GRAY.

A NOVEL

BY

CHARLES GIBBON

AUTHOR OF "DANGEROUS CONNEXIONS."

" Had we never loved sæ kindly,
Had we never loved sæ blindly,
Never met—or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

—*Burns.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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ROBIN GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE LAIRD O' CLASHGIRN.

"The Laird o' Cockpen, he's proud and he's great,
His mind is ta'en up wi' affairs o' the stâte."

NICOL McWHAPPLE, with a startled expression on his sharp, hawkish features, sat in his chair, clutching his silver snuff-box tightly with one hand, whilst the other was arrested midway between the box and his nose with a pinch of the pungent dust.

He stared searchingly at the frank, good-natured face of the young man who was standing on the hearth. Presently the look of alarm faded, and the face assumed its ordinary stolid and expressionless cast, as

the hand continued its journey to the nose, and thrust the snuff up the nostrils energetically. Then he closed the box with a vigorous snap.

It was something to have made Nicol McWhapple angry, for it was the boast of the Laird of Clashgirn that he never lost command of his temper. It was still more to have brought an expression—and especially an expression of alarm—to his visage; for it was a by-word amongst some of the folk in Portlappoch that “ye could nae mair ken what the Laird was thinking by his face than ye could tell what he was gaun to do by what he said.”

It was a keen face running from the high cheek-bones to a sharp point at the clean-shaven chin. The complexion sallow, with a sandyish reflection from the thin, short whiskers, and the thin, yellowish hair. When in conversation the face had always a quiet pawky smile, suggestive of how much more

he knew of the circumstances concerning which one might be speaking than the speaker did, and what a deal of information he could give if he thought it necessary. At the same time he had a way of drooping the lids over his small, pale, ferrety eyes, and occasionally giving his head a jerk forward like a hawk dabbing at its prey.

Placid, pawky, cunning, with a small shrunk body and a lame leg, he had fought his way to wealth, and such respect as a certain degree of sanctimonious conduct and successful trading always command.

So, it was a feat to have moved such a personage as this, and possibly the consequences to the performer of the feat would be all the more serious on account of the speed with which the apparent effect was dispelled.

“Do ye mean to say, Jeamie, that I would be guilty o’ onything dishonourable, or in contravention o’ the law of the land,”

said the Laird, with his pawky smile, and one of his hawkish dabs, whilst he tapped the lid of his snuff-box playfully.

“I’m no to say onything unless you provoke me, Laird, and then it would only be to yoursel’. I’m no a gauger, thank goodness, nor a messenger-at-arms either, and you’ve been my frien’,” was the answer of James Falcon, a stalwart young fellow in loose rough garments, partaking in character as much of the fisherman as the ploughman.

A bright, dark-eyed fellow, with crisp black hair, open, honest countenance, and broad chest. Whilst he acted as grieve on Clashgirn, he was frequently out with the herring-fishers, so that he had learned to handle the small craft with as much skill as he guided a plough or a horse, and he knew every sounding from Portlappoch to Islay.

“Aye, jist so,” commented the Laird, “only

to mysel'. Weel, are you trying to threaten me into submission to your wishes? Is that what you're driving at?"

"Threaten!" and Jeamie laughed loudly; "hoots man, what's the use o' taking it that way. This is just the long and the short o't. I come to you and tell you I want to get married, and you see no objection to that. Then I mind you that you promised to let me have the farm o' Askaig some day."

"I'll say that yet (benignantly), and I never break my word."

"Well, I tell you I want it now, and you answer me by asking what siller I hae to stock it. But you ken well enough that I hav'nae a penny. You have never given me a wage for my work; you have scarcely given me a shilling to let me ken the road to my pouch; and when I tell you that I have nothing, you haud up your hands, and gie me a sermon about extravagance and riotous living."

“In the which I was but doing my duty as an elder o’ the kirk, and as your friend.”

Jeamie laughed again, but with a shade of contempt on his honest face this time.

“May be so, Laird, as an elder it might be your duty to preach; but as my friend you ken’d that I never had a chance of being a wastrail. You ken’d that the Laird o’ Clashgirn was profiting by my management o’ the farm, and has profited for the last five year better than he’s ever likely to do again wi’ the same place. Weel, in return for the work I have given you without a grumble and without a fee, I ask you noo to let me have the farm, and give me two years’ credit for the stock.”

“Which is a very modest demand in your estimation, nae doot” (tapping the snuff-box).

“Modest enough, considerin’ that I have never had a ploughman’s wages for doing the work o’ three, and for bringing a guid few

hunnors into your purse that would never have been there without me. But you ken that I am asking nothing from you that I will not repay with whatever interest you want; only you think that you made more out of me on the old terms. And so you would, if it did not happen that the old terms are at an end. I am going to be married, and I must have the means to keep my wife."

"A very sensible determination, Jeamie; I commend your forethocht in looking out for the meal afore ye bring a hungry mou' to the parritch pot. That's an excellent principle to observe."

"Thank you for discovering so much good in me. But when you answered me wi' a screed o' texts about ingratitude and self-seeking, and that while I ken'd that you were calculating how many pounds sterling you would lose by the change, I could not help letting you feel that I ken'd whar a

part o' your siller cam frae, and hoo it was gotten."

"Ye mean, of course, your ain suspicion, which is no worth a bodle in a court o' law. If I looked ony way queer when ye mentioned the matter, it was just the natural surprise o' a man in my position and o' my character even being suspekct o' dealing unfairly wi' the fortune o' a friend, and especially an unlucky ane. But we'll set that aside for the present, and if ye please we'll look at your ain particular affairs."

"That's more to my liking."

"Very weel: ye hae stated your case, and I'm no saying but that ye hae put it wi' as muckle ability as lawyer Carnegie could hae done himsel'. Now let me state mine."

"Out wi't."

"Very weel: just look round ye. This is a cosy bit parlour, an' there's no muckle wrong wi' the house. Onyway there's aye plenty meat and drink in it, and that's a

blessing everybody has nae got. Everything has been at your command; ye hae never wanted bite nor sup for fifteen year. Ye hae been treated just as though ye had been a bairn o' my ain, and I'm no saying but I may hae had thoughts o' leaving ye a bit siller when the time cam' for my savings to be distributed. But a while before that time, ye come and make a demand upon me, just as though ye had the richt to demand, and that gars me think ye hae forgotten that ye are neither kith nor kin to me."

There was a shadow deepening on Jeamie's face.

"No, Laird," he said in a low voice, and giving his shoulders a rough twist, "I hae forgotten naething."

"Aye, weel, it does nae harm to mind ye that fifteen year syne, a woman wi' a laddie about six year auld cam' to this house. She was footsore and hungry, puir body, and I took pity on her. I gied her meat and drink

and a bed to lie on. Folk said I ought to hae sent her to the poorhouse; but she was nae weel, and I let her bide here twa or three days——”

“Aye, but folk said and say you had other reasons than charity for keeping her here, where naebody could learn what she might hae had to say about hersel’ or her bairn,” interrupted Falcon, with an angry flush.

The Laird’s eyelids drooped; he smiled as if pitying the young man’s ignorance and passion. Then he took another pinch of snuff, made another hawkish dab, and proceeded:

“She died here, and I buried her at my ain cost in the auld kirkyard. Ye ken the place.”

The rough sleeve of Jeamie’s coat was shading his eyes at that moment. He was choking, and made no answer, for he was thinking how often he had stood staring at the slab of stone which covered the grave,

and how cold and silent it had always been to his eager questioning about the unhappy mother whose image was only a shadowy memory to him, but whose love was always with him.

“Mair than that,” the Laird continued, “her laddie, wha had nae frien’s that onybody hereabout ken’d o’, would hae had to gang to the poorhouse; but instead o’ that I kept him here, gied him a decent education, and brought him up in a Christian way. If he worked for me, and if he was obedient to me, it was nae mair than I had a richt to expeck after a’ I had done for him. Lastly, I think that before he speaks o’ settin’ up for himsel’, and asking me for the loan o’ the necessary capital, he ought to think o’ repaying me the outlay I hae been at on his account.”

“So be it, then,” said Falcon impetuously, “I’ll pay you every farthing of it if I live, but I’ll work no more for you. What is the

sum you demand, in addition to the work you have already had?"

"I couldna just exactly tell ye at a minute's notice, but I'll mak up the account."

"And I'll pay it, if I live. But let there be no more talk of gratitude between us, seeing that I know enough to hang you if I cared to follow up the clue."

A second time the expression of alarm flitted across Nicol McWhapple's visage, and again it disappeared under the influence of a vigorous pinch of snuff. As James Falcon was striding to the door, he called to him in his pawky tone,

"Bide a wee, Jeamie, lad, bide a wee. Although ye hae lost your temper, and consequently your common sense, I hae nae. Ye hae scarcely a bawbee in your pouch, and yet ye're talking o' repaying me maybe a hunner pounds just as though ye had a bag o' gowd. I'll no press ye for my account, ye ken, but what are ye to do for a living?"

Fee yoursel'?—I'll gie ye a recommendation."

"No, I'll not fee."

"Maybe ye would like to turn sailor?"

"That is what I mean to do. A sailor has better wages than a ploughman, and mair chance of making money, and I must get money."

"Just so. Then if ye like I'll speak to Ivan Carrach. His brig is to sail the morn, and maybe he'll gie ye a berth if I ask him."

Falcon hesitated, then with sudden resolution:

"I'll accept this service from you, because it'll help me to pay your debt the sooner."

And without a word of thanks he went out.

The Laird sat with his chin sunk on his breast, and his ferrety eyes twinkling at the fire. He was thinking of the ingratitude of his species, no doubt, and especially of this youth, whom he had fed and clothed, and

who had now, like the serpent, stung the bosom to which he had been metaphorically pressed. He was thinking of the fellow's boldness and heartlessness, which had dared to impugn his respectability. What would the members of the kirk say, what would the minister say, if that story at which Falcon had hinted were revived amongst them?

It had given him trouble enough years ago; it had cost him more than twenty years of sanctimonious hypocrisy to overcome the doubts of his honesty which were abroad. He had succeeded at last; as witness the fact that he had been elected elder of the kirk and a magistrate of the burgh. He had as great a craving for respectability as a pretty woman has for flattery. And he had obtained it. He had made "siller," and he had become known to the great families of the county; he had even been privileged to obtain an audience with the Duke of Argyle on one occasion.

All that he had craved he had won; and now—the breath of one man threatened to blow down the house of cards he had been at so much pains to build. That man, too, was the one who had helped to build the house; for Nicol McWhapple's charity in first succouring the strange woman from the storm and starvation, and then adopting her child into his house, had been the prime cause of his elevation to favour in the eyes of the folk of Portlappoch.

The story which placed him in this predicament was a simple one, so far as it was known. Hugh Sutherland, the former proprietor of the lands whereof McWhapple was the present laird, had been known to his friends and neighbours as a timid man—one more likely to tremble at the suggestion of a conspiracy than to join it. Yet suddenly it was made known that he had become involved in one of those wretched conspiracies for the overthrow of the government which

the French Revolution engendered in Britain.

Everybody who had any acquaintance with the man was astounded; more at the idea of such a man falling into such an error than at the error itself. The rumour, however, was confirmed, for before any open proceedings could be taken against him, Mr. Sutherland, to save his estate from confiscation, made it over to Nicol McWhapple, his friend and factor; and to save his head from the penalty of his sin, he escaped to France.

The last positive news that was heard of him was to the effect that he had married. Afterwards came rumours that he had died in poverty, and had left his wife and a child to the charity of strangers, for she had no relations to assist her. The sorrowful picture which this rumour presented roused the ire of the folk against Nicol, who was reported to have taken advantage of the circumstances under which Sutherland had fled, and to have

denied the unfortunate exile and his family the bare means of subsistence out of his own property.

The statement of McWhapple, however, was simple, and he produced letters and other documents to verify it. Sutherland had gambled largely at the German Spas: McWhapple as his agent had raised money by mortgage to supply his employer. The latter died in a drunken brawl; and his wife was carried to the same grave six weeks after her husband. They had no children; and according to the will of Sutherland the property was left—so far as he had power to leave it, and so far as there was anything to leave after the mortgages had been redeemed—to Nicol McWhapple, his faithful friend and factor.

By dint of saving and successful trading McWhapple was enabled to pay off the mortgages gradually, and at last to enter into full possession as the Laird of Clashgirn.

For some reason known to himself he was troubled in spirit as he ruminated on these matters, and he dipped frequently into his snuff-box, which was always an indication that he was perturbed.

At last he seized his staff, which was almost as stout and big as a crutch, and raised himself to his feet.

“Aye, I’ll see Ivan Carrach and I’ll double the insurance,” he muttered, “syne if ony-thing should happen it’s a’ through his ain thrawnness, and the Lord’s will be done.”

Mr. McWhapple limped out to the stable and caused the cattleman to saddle his pony.

CHAPTER II.

A PARTING.

“The nicht is mirk an’ the wind blaws schill,
An’ the white faem weets my bree,
An’ my mind misgies me, gay maiden,
That the land we shall never see.”—*Wm. Motherwell.*

The Laird had seen James Falcon laughing good-naturedly at the terror his revival of that old story about the Sutherlands, and certain hints anent the character of the Laird’s trading had caused; and he had seen him downcast enough when he found that his proposal for the farm was rejected. But he could no more understand the real extent of Falcon’s suffering than he could appreciate its source.

Falcon had been obliged to work hard for the charity Dives had extended to him, and out of which so much capital had been made.

He had, however, found a friend in the minister, Mr. Monduff, and with his assistance he had managed to educate himself to a degree much beyond that usually attained by lads of a much higher position. Rough work, rough usage, and rough companions had not extinguished a certain natural refinement in the lad, for happily his reading and honest heart had counteracted the influences which his position brought to bear upon him.

He had quitted Clashgirn in a sad humour; but he had little shown the bitter feelings he endured; he had said little of the dream he had been nursing for two years, and which had grown to be the leading influence of his life.

He felt that he had repaid the Laird trebly for all that he had done for him, and he had expected him to observe the promise he had given him more than once.

He had a kindly feeling toward the man

who had been his benefactor, although he had long ceased to respect him.

He could not shut his eyes to the thousand petty hypocrisies of the Laird's character, and the perception of them was fatal to respect.

But at the present moment he felt as if even what liking he had for him had been extinguished by this last stroke of utter selfishness, as he regarded it. There would have been much bitterness in his heart had not its sense of loss been too great for minor feelings to obtain much sway. Contempt does not spring up in a day in a generous nature. He was disposed rather to make the best of matters as they stood, and to seek courage in hope than to waste time in useless revilings.

"For after all," he thought, "I have no right to expect him to make any sacrifice on my account. I can work, and Jeanie will wait."

He had come to that healthy conclusion by the time he reached Portlappoch, which was distant about two miles from Clashgirn.

The village, or town as the inhabitants invariably called it, consisted of about a dozen rows of houses running in irregular lines from the shore, half way up a broad hill, which was one of a range stretching east and west. The houses were of all sizes and shapes, from the low-built brown thatched cot of the fisher to the two-story sandstone mansion which had been erected for the bank. They were with few exceptions whitewashed, and covered for the most part with red tiles or thatch. They were huddled closely together as if for protection and warmth, consequently the streets or lanes were narrow and pervaded with the smell and signs of the chief article of trade in the place—fish. Heads, tails, and sometimes whole skeletons of fish of every kind were plentifully strewn about, until a shower of rain

fell and swept the streets clean down to the shore, where the sea lapping the shingly beach murmured its plaintive song of hope and warning to the wives and bairns of those who were out upon its broad bosom. Boat-building was the next important business of the little place, but that was confined chiefly to the making and repair of the fishermen's smacks, or an occasional job with some of the craft which put in at the port. The coopers did a thriving business; and on market-days the two inns barely afforded accommodation for the custom of the farmers and cattle-dealers who gathered on those occasions.

Just outside the village, and overlooking the beach, stood a square whitewashed cottage, with blackened thatch, square windows with small diamond-shaped panes, two rough cut fir poles standing as a sort of porch in front of the squat-looking door which opened in halves and admitted one straight to the

kitchen. Half a dozen oars of various lengths leaning against the porch, the walls hung with nets, an old boat lying bottom upwards, cocks and hens pecking about, a cow grazing on the bit of grass by the roadside, and a general air of cleanliness about everything—such were the chief characteristics of Adam Lindsay's home. Adam himself was seated on the old boat mending a net, and a girl was standing in the doorway shading the light of the setting sun from her eyes with her hand, and peering down the road. Through the trees, which were just beginning to bud and put on their gay spring dress, she caught a glimpse of James Falcon coming along at his swinging pace.

The hand dropped to her side, and she smiled happily as she retreated into the house and resumed the task she had left for a moment to look for his coming.

She was a bonnie lass, with fair hair, brown eyes, and brown cheeks. There was a bright

healthy look on the face always, with its soft impulsive features. She was about twenty years of age, and in her neat short-gown, blue-striped petticoat, and tidy apron, made a prettier picture than if she had been arrayed in all the finery of the city madam. There was nothing at all sentimental about her manner or bearing, although she had from childhood known the difficulties of making both ends meet. She had stout arms and hands, which showed that she was accustomed to use them in earnest work.

She could read the Bible, and she could write a letter with some care ; but that was about the limit of her educational acquirements ; for she had been permitted few opportunities even if she had had the desire to learn more.

For eight years she had been the house-keeper. She had been compelled to look after the cooking, the cleaning, the hens, and the cow ; and she had had to nurse her mother

who had been stricken with paralysis, and for eight years had scarcely been able to move farther than from the bed to the arm-chair.

This was more than a young girl's share of responsibilities; but Jeanie submitted to them with a good cheer that made the work seem light and the duty easy to perform.

Adam was proud of his daughter, and loved her in his way. He would have risked his life under any circumstances to have saved hers, as indeed he would have risked it to save that of anybody else whom he might have seen in danger. But his was a dry sort of nature, and although in his pride of Jeanie he might boast of her thrift and industry, he did not seem to realize the idea that she was doing any more than she ought to do, or than any other girl would do under similar conditions.

He was disposed to rule his house with a rod of iron, and exacted strict obedience

to his slightest command. He had no idea of sympathizing with his daughter, and yet he was not intentionally a hard man either to wife or daughter. He was disposed to be out of humour and sterner than usual whenever he had had a bad "take;" but otherwise he was good-tempered enough.

He was industrious, and although fond of a dram, he did not often get fou'. He went to kirk regularly twice every Sabbath—making a slight stir perhaps in starting about the dressing of his shirt front and the arrangement of his stock; and he spent the afternoon, with brief intervals, during which he went out to look at the weather, in reading the Bible to his daughter and bed-stricken wife, his favourite chapter being the fifth of Luke, where Simon obtains the miraculous draught of fishes.

"Weel, Jeames, how's a' wi' ye?" he said, drawing the net across his knees, and without looking up, as Falcon advanced.

"Is Jeanie in?" was the abrupt response.

"Aye, she's ben the house" (looking up); but what's wrang wi' ye that ye're scoolin' like a fishwife at a bad bawbee?"

"Everything's wrang, Adam, but ye'll ken about it soon enough. I want to see Jeanie first."

And he went into the house.

As he entered Jeanie was baking bannocks, with the sleeves of her short-gown rolled up, displaying the plump rounded arms; and she turned with one of the cakes on her hands to place it on the girdle, giving him a quick bright glance and a smile at the same time. But the smile fled at sight of the trouble on his face.

All that he had come to tell was soon told. Their marriage must be postponed for a year, may be two years, for the Laird had broken his promise, and he must go work for money to make a house for her.

He was a little chagrined that she did not

take the news more to heart. But she only looked serious for a moment, and then, wiping her hands, she said quietly:

“We’re no that auld but we can wait a year or twa, Jeamie; and maybe it’s better sae, for I dinna ken what mither would do if I was oot o’ the house.”

“Aye,” he said bitterly, but I had hoped to offer your mother a home with us, and now there’s no chance of that for a long while, and Lord kens what may happen before then. The outlook is a driech ane for you an’ me baith.”

“But we needna mak’ it waur nor it is, Jeamie, by frichtenin’ oursel’s wi’ thochts o’ brownies and kelpies that may never come near us. The best way is to tak’ a stout heart to a stey brae, and, as the minister says, wha kens what fortune we’ll find when we win to the tap.”

He took her hands—the meal had been rubbed off them now—and he looked in her

bonnie bright face, feeling much the same as a man might who is suddenly brought out of darkness into the sunshine.

“Ye’re a sensible lass,” he said, smiling hopefully; “and you mind me that I didna come here to draw a long face, and bewail my lot, but to tell you that the thocht o’ you will put pith into my heart and arms, that for your sake I’ll work—aye, and win too.”

“That’s mair like yoursel’, Jeamie,” and there were tears in her eyes as she spoke, for with all the perversity of a woman’s nature, as soon as he begun to think cheerfully of the parting, she begun to realize its pain. But they spoke bravely of the future for all that, and with the trust of youth planned what was to be done a year or two years hence with as much confidence as if the period to elapse were only a day.

Then Adam came in, and the state of affairs was explained to him. He did not see anything to be troubled about, and he

wished Jeames a guid voyage in just the same tone as he was accustomed at nights to wish him a safe road hame.

The three went "butt the house," to the auld wife, a patient, meek-eyed woman, who endured her affliction with the calmness of one whose faith is perfect.

"The Lord prosper ye in the strange paths that lie afore ye, Jeemie," she said kindly, "and dinna forget to read your Bible constantly. In the wildest storm ye're as safe on sea as land when ye're in God's care. That thocht has comforted me mony a time when Adam was in danger."

Jeanie went to the door with him. They lingered there listening to that strange song of the sea, which was louder than ever it had been before now, and bore a new meaning.

"When I hear it, I'll be thinking o' ye, an praying for ye," she said, with a subdued sob.

He hugged her in his arms as if he never could part with her. Then with an effort,

and a stifled husky "Heaven keep ye, my lass," he broke away from her, running down the road toward the town as if afraid to look back. But when he reached the end of the old dyke where he would disappear from her, he turned.

She was still there. She waved her hand, and he felt that she was trying to give him a last smile of comfort through her tears.

She was standing there long after she had lost sight of him, standing there watching the road he had gone by, while the sun was sinking rapidly and the clouds were darkening overhead. Her heart was sinking too, for it seemed as if the sun were setting upon her happiness, and those murky clouds up yonder betokened the coming storm.

She was roused at last by her father's voice bidding her come into the house. She turned to her work with some notion that busy hands soften grief. And she had need to be busy at present, for her mother was worse

than usual, and the last had been the worst fishing season her father had ever known. So that he who had prided himself upon owing no man a farthing, was at this time owing several pounds, and that was an enormous sum to Adam Lindsay and his daughter.

She had not mentioned this to James Falcon, but she had been thinking of it when she had said that perhaps it was better their marriage should be delayed a little while yet.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE PORT.

! “To mak’ the crown a pound my Jeamie gaed to sea,
 An’ the crown an’ the pound they were baith for me.”

—*The Ballad.*

Down at the Port amidst barrels and ropes and boat-tackle of all descriptions, a group of men—sailors, fishermen, and ragged hangers-on who eke out a living at all such places by doing odd jobs for anybody who will give them a few pence—were discussing some important topic in which the brig *Colin*, lying in the port, was interested, as was apparent from the frequent curious glances which were cast toward her.

At the water edge was another group; but this one consisted of men and women, and

chiefly townsfolk, who were gathered around the owner of a fishing-smack which had just come in. They were haggling about the price of fish, every one keenly alive as to the value of a penny, amidst much jesting and laughing.

Loudest amongst the higglers was a woman, who was raised above the others by standing up in her cart, to which a shaggy patient-looking donkey was harnessed. The cart was not much bigger than a large-sized barrow, and was a rough-looking affair glistening all over with fish-scales. The body was constructed of unplanned boards rudely nailed together, and seemed shaky enough.

Girzie Todd and her cuddy-cart were known all over the country. She bought fish at the Port, and with her cart conveyed it from house to house and from farm to farm, earning a decent livelihood for herself and her son—"a puir demintit creatur', wha had na half the gumption o' his mither's cuddy,"

as the folk said, pitying the mother and admiring her brisk industrious ways, wondering often what was to become of the poor natural when her time came.

She was a woman of about fifty years, but as lithe as a girl of twenty. She was about the average height of women, but with the firm muscles of a man, although there was nothing either coarse or masculine in her figure. She was simply firmly knit as one might say; and her face, brown as an autumn leaf, was lit by two sparkling gray eyes and showed regular features, which indicated that once on a time she had been a braw lass with wooers in plenty.

She was a sharp, busy woman, with ready hands, quick wit, and quick ears.

Of the latter faculty she gave an evidence now; for whilst she was bargaining for the fish, one of the men of the first group said excitedly and speaking louder than the others—

“He swore Pe-tam she would sail wi’ the morn’s tide whether it was Friday or Saturday. I’se no gae wi’ him ony way, for it’s just fleeing in the face o’ Providence.”

“Aye, man,” cried Girzie turning round, “Ivan Carrach was ay kenned to be ready tae flee in the face o’ Providence or ony ither body that was in his gate. But there’s a storm brewing yonder in the lift that’ll maybe gar him be sorry for ’t this time.”

Whether she spoke figuratively or not nobody seemed to guess, but all glanced upwards and shook their heads forebodingly. The bold Highland skipper, who was disposed to sail when he was ready in spite of all the superstition of the seamen against beginning a voyage on a Friday, had no friends there. Two of his hands had openly refused to join him as soon as his intention to sail next day had been made known.

Girzie was back to her bargaining again in a minute, and so she did not seem to

observe James Falcon, who came up to the seaman who had declared his resolve not to sail in the *Colin*, and asked if he knew where Carrach might be found.

"I saw him up at the Port Inn wi' Clashgirn," answered another of the men, and Falcon immediately wheeled about.

The Port Inn was the larger of the two hostelries in the village, and was situated about half-way up the main street. It was squat, old-fashioned, whitewashed, and red-tiled; surrounded by stables and sheds, and having a large open space in front, which, on market-days, was crowded with carts and gigs.

The Laird was mounting his Shetland pony, and Carrach was assisting him, as Falcon approached.

"Ye understand, then, Carrach," McWhapple was saying in an undertone, whilst his eyes twinkled on the skipper, "it would be nae great loss to you or me if onything hap-

pened the brig; and the lad's meddlesome and nicht do you harm."

"I'll know all about it," answered Carrach, slowly, and with a strong Highland twang.

"Od, it's extraordinar', here's the lad himsel'," said the Laird, observing Falcon. "I have spoken to Carrach, Jeamie, and arranged everything for you wi' him. But you can speak to him yoursel' now, and I'll see you when you come hame for your claes. Guid day to you, Carrach, and a safe voyage."

McWhapple's pony moved away with its master at a douce jog-trot pace.

"So, you are the lad," said Carrach, giving his shaggy red head a jerk, which was intended for a nod of recognition.

He was a broad-built fellow, with fiery red hair, whiskers, and beard, which gave his bovine-like eyes and pug-nose the appearance of features planted in the midst of a huge sunflower.

"I suppose so," answered Falcon, "will I do?"

The calf's eyes of the man rolled over him as if measuring his height, weight, and strength.

"You'll no be feart to sail on a Friday?"

"No."

"Then you'll to ; and as I want to clear the port afore twelve if it's possible, shust to quiet thae gomerils wha are feart of the Friday, the sooner you are on poard the petter,—Pe-tam."

The latter words were the usual termination of any observation the skipper desired to render emphatic.

The Laird, in his character of generous patron, had evidently arranged matters so completely with Carrach that there remained nothing for the young man himself to do but to get on board.

It puzzled him for a moment to comprehend why McWhapple should take so much in-

terest in his affairs after what had passed between them, and the unpleasant manner in which they had parted. But the riddle was solved as soon as he remembered that it was the Laird's policy in every unpleasant transaction to do his utmost to bring matters into such a focus as to enable him to play the martyr. Thereby he obtained new credit for his meek, suffering, injured innocence. The whole conduct of the man was plain to Falcon when he recollected that. So he laughed and hurried back to Clashgirn. He made up his clothes in a bundle—he had not many, and he did not take more than he thought he would positively need—and then he proceeded to take his leave of the folk about the place.

First, there was Mrs. Begg the housekeeper—a buxom widow, who had long lived in the hope of one day becoming Mrs. McWhapple. The dame's breath was taken away by Jeamie's announcement of his de-

parture; and the next minute she was filling his pockets with whangs of cheese and farls of oatcake, so that he should not starve on the first stage of his journey at any rate.

Next, there was the Laird, who played the martyr as Falcon had expected, and even pretended to be deeply affected at the sudden separation, assuring him again and again that it was no desire of his that he should leave the comfortable house in which he had been brought up and tenderly cared for. He was beginning what threatened to be a long lecture of paternal counsel, well larded with text, when Jeamie stopped him with an abrupt reminder of their recent conversation.

“Od, it’s extro’rdinar!” exclaimed the Laird, with a sigh of resignation, and taking a pinch of snuff, but not in the least abashed; “aweel, aweel, gang your ain gate, Jeamie lad; but ye’ll travel a day and a nicht afore ye find a hame like the ane you’re flinging frae ye.”

“For what you have done, Laird, you have

my thanks," answered Jeamie frankly; "for what you might have done—well, I had no right to expect it."

And he broke away, the exclamation, "Od, it's extro'rdinar," reaching his ears as he closed the door.

Next to the byre where the lasses were milking, and then to the stable where the lads had just come in from the fields and were "sorting" their horses for the night. Lasses and lads were astounded and grieved too; for he had been a kindly taskmaster and a true friend to them all. They gave him a hearty good speed when, after shaking hands with the men and—yes, though his heart was full of Jeanie—kissing the lasses, he hurried down the road. All the good qualities he had possessed, and a few he had not possessed, were canvassed regretfully that night in the bothy and the cots.

By ten o'clock he was at the Port again, and as he was making his way to the brig,

guided by her lights, his arm was suddenly grasped by somebody who darted upon him from the darkness.

“Holloa, who’s that?”

“Deed an’ it’s just me, Girzie Todd,” was the answer in the brisk tones of the fishwife; “an’ here hae I been waiting a whale hour this mirk nicht expeckin’ ye.”

“Waiting for me!—Why, Girzie?”

Her hand tightened upon his arm as if she were labouring with some strong emotion.

“Adam Lindsay tauld me ye were to sail in the *Colin*.”

“And so I am. I’m going on board now, as she sails to-night. What then?”

“I wanted to warn ye no to gang with Ivan Carrach,” she said, drawing him close to her, and speaking in his ear with a strange earnestness.

“And why not, for Guid’s sake?”

He was almost inclined to laugh at her singular conduct.

"Ye'll maybe think it's just an auld wife's clavers," she answered in the same serious tone, "but tak' tent; ye want to come back an' marry Jeanie, an' ye'll never come back if ye gang in that boat."

"Toots, Girzie, why should I not go in the *Colin* as well as any other?"

"Because *the Colin's doomed!*"

Falcon was not sure whether to laugh outright or take alarm. Her words were serious, her manner impressive, but he could not throw up his duty for mere words, which might or might not be spoken in jest.

"How do you happen to ken a' this?" he asked.

She seemed to divine the incredulence with which her warning had been received, and she flung his arm from her.

"I canna tell ye ony mair, an' I winna," she answered sharply, drawing her short cloak around her; "if it hadna been for Jeanie's sake, I would na hae said as muckle.

But gang ye i' the *Colin*, an' ye'll never be guidman tae Jeanie Lindsay."

"If any danger threatens the brig that's all the more reason why I should be aboard, for if I can save her it'll maybe repay some of the debt I owe Clashgirn."

Girzie uttered a low contemptuous laugh.

"Hae your way; I hae dune a' I can to save ye."

"Good-bye, Girzie; I'll come back to Jeanie, tell her, whatever befa' the *Colin*."

There was no answer. Girzie had moved away before he had finished speaking, and in the darkness had disappeared immediately.

There was a general bustle and flitting of lights on board when Falcon stepped on the deck. He was set to work at once, and the excitement soon drove Girzie's words out of his mind.

There was a stiff breeze in their favour, and the brig was soon out of port.

"Heave ahead, lads," shouted Carrach

hoarsely, “and tam ta Friday—we’ve cheated her this time.”

So they had, for as the sails were filling to the breeze they heard faintly on the waters the bell of the Portlappoch steeple tolling midnight.

CHAPTER IV.

FOREBODINGS.

“The gloomy night is gathering fast,
Loud roars the wild inconstant blast.
Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,
I see it driving o’er the plain.”—*Burns*.

Since early morning the clouds in dense gray masses had been shifting restlessly. Heavy showers had descended at intervals, sweeping the streets of the town, and drenching the crowds of farmers and their wives—the latter having skirts carefully tucked up—soaking the groups of grain merchants, farm servants, cattle-dealers, drovers, and the miscellaneous characters with barrowfuls of “sweeties” who usually assembled on the market day.

Business was dull as the day except at the inns, which were reeking with the fumes of

toddy and the steam off the wet garments of the customers. Knots of men stood under the shelter of sheds and doorways chaffering, and the cattle stood dripping in the market-place. Men and cattle were "drookit" and uncomfortable. So the necessary business of the day was hurried over, and all who could manage it started early for home.

Fishermen's wives cast anxious glances toward the glistening sea, which, as if in sympathy with the clouds, rolled and tossed hungrily, heaving up white spiteful foam on the beach and against the stone walls of the quay.

Jeanie was one of those who looked often and troublously toward the sea, for Adam had gone out before daybreak in spite of the threatening storm. Her mother too seemed to be unusually affected by the weather, for she had one of her "bad turns" in the morning, and she was very weak.

Frequently she had asked Jeanie if there

were any signs of her father returning, and Jeanie had ran round to the end of the house to peer across the broad turbulent water. But it was only to go back to her mother with the unsatisfactory tidings that although she saw several boats putting in for the shore, she could not distinguish her father's amongst them.

As the afternoon advanced, the clouds darkened, and a white rainy mist lowered upon the water, so that she could see nothing beyond the beach. Her mother's uneasiness disturbed her—filled her with strange fears. Her father had been out in many a storm, but she had never experienced such anxiety as on this day.

Somehow she seemed to have lost courage during the few weeks which had elapsed since James Falcon's departure. At any rate, she was more easily alarmed than formerly at the thought of storms and wrecks. The great rolling ocean seemed to her more callous,

more resistless, and bigger than it had ever seemed previously. That new meaning which she had obtained from the ceaseless murmur of the waters while standing at the door with Falcon on the evening of his departure was broadening out into new thoughts, new hopes, and fears.

“Nae sight o’ him yet, Jeanie?” queried her mother again, when she saw her lighting the candle and placing it in the window to serve as a feeble beacon to the absent one.

“He’ll be hame the noo, mither,” was Jeanie’s answer, in a tone that she tried to render cheerful; “that is, if he be na to bide ower at the Mull a’ nicht.”

“Aye, he used to dae that whiles langsyne when it was ower rough to cross,” muttered Mrs. Lindsay in the tone of one who tries feebly to unseat a conviction which is obtaining a firm place in her mind.

The thunder of wind and waves rendered the voices of the women scarcely audible to

each other, and a knock at the door had to be repeated two or three times before Jeanie observed it. Then her eyes opened wide, and she glanced nervously toward her mother to see if she had heard the summons.

She had heard it, and her sad shrunken face wore the expression of one who listens intently for the confirmation of some terror.

"There's somebody chappin," Jeanie said, with assumed indifference, as she proceeded to answer the knock.

A fierce gust of wind blew out the candle the moment she opened the door, so that she could not see who was standing without.

"Wha's that?" she asked, and her voice trembled with vague fears in spite of the assurance she had tried to force upon herself that this was some one who had missed the road in the darkness, and, seeing the light in the cottage, had stopped to inquire the way.

"It's me, Jeanie," was the response in a kindly tone. "I want to come ben, an' I'm

trying to fasten the bridle o' the powny to the bush here."

She knew the voice, although there was a strange tone in it to-night—a tone which suddenly gave shape to all those vague fears she had been haunted by. She hastily closed the door of her mother's room, retreated to the kitchen, and lit the candle at the fire. When she turned round the man was standing beside her.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, muscular man, dressed in garments of rough home-spun tweed, and with an enormous gray plaid drawn tightly across his breast and shoulders. His clothes were soaked with the rain, and as he removed his broad-brimmed bonnet to shake the water from it, a massive head, with thick iron-gray hair and clear high brow, were revealed. His features were plain, but the light of his deep-set blue eyes was indicative, on close observation, of a strong will underlying a warm genial nature.

He was, in brief, one of those honest common-place farmer-like bodies whom you would meet a dozen times before you became conscious of anything more than that he possessed a loud friendly voice, a hearty smile and considerable muscular development. He was in age over fifty years, but his hale healthy appearance would have suggested that he was scarcely more than forty.

The moment Jeanie saw his face she knew that there was something wrong, and her own became white, for the wind was souging wildly round the house.

Usually his greeting was loud and hearty, and his eyes sparkled with good humour. But now he wore a wistful doubting expression in which pity and respect were mingled. Besides, he occupied an unnecessary length of time in shaking his bonnet and uttering fitful ejaculations about the storm and the darkness.

She noted these things and waited for him

to speak, but when she saw that his eyes could not meet hers steadily, she passed quickly to the door without a word.

She peered down the road and distinguished two lights flickering feebly through the mist and moving toward her; and she experienced a sickening sensation, while the pale lights suddenly began to dance before her fantastically.

The man had followed her, and his hand was now laid quietly on her arm drawing her from the door. She looked up at him with a white still face, and she was shivering as with intense cold.

"Ye needna speak, Mister Gray," she whispered, glancing affrightedly toward the room in which her mother lay listening. "I ken a'. My faither's drooned."

"No, no, Jeanie," he interrupted huskily, "it's no sae bad as a' that."

She gripped his arm quickly, gazing at him beseechingly, as if she thought that with

kindly intent he might be trying to hide the truth.

“What are the folk bringing here, then?”

“Your faither; but there’s no muckle wrang wi’ him. He was landin’ safe an’ sound frae his boat when a muckle wave gied her a wallop in the stern, and wi’ the lurch she gied your faither tumbled down and hurt himself a wee. But it’s naething particular, the doctor says—a broken arm at the warst.”

“Are ye—are ye sure it’s nae waur?”

“Sure as that I’m here telling o’t. I was about taking my way hame frae market when I heard that Adam had got himself hurt, and I gaed doon to see what was wrang. Syne, after the doctor had sorted him up a wee, we got Girzie Todd’s cuddy-cart to bring him hame, and I thocht I would ride on afore the lave, sae that ye might be kind o’ prepared to see him carried in. He’s weakly wi’ the sair faucht he had to cross frae the Mull, and nae wonder, sae that he looks waur nor he is,

and is a wee thing insensible. But that's a', ye may be sure."

"Thank ye, Mister Gray," she said, with a big sob of relief, while the tears sprung to her eyes. "I'll gang but and tell mither afore the folk come up."

Mrs. Lindsay, with a strength that seemed unnatural in one stricken as she was, had raised herself on her elbow and was staring fixedly at the door.

"What's wrang wi' your faither?" she asked feebly as her daughter appeared.

"Ye needna be frichted, mither, he's just got himsel' hurt; but Mister Gray, wha's ben the house, says it's naething particular."

And she briefly repeated his explanation of the event.

"The Lord's will be dune," exclaimed the mother meekly, and sinking back on her pillows.

If Jeanie had told her that he was dead she would probably have subsided in the same

placid manner with the same ejaculation. Not that she was in any way indifferent to him; but simply because her existence for years past had been one of submission to a severe dispensation, and she had learned to accept all the good and ill of the life in which she could take no active part with the one salutation, "His will be done."

Girzie Todd made her appearance with a lantern in one hand, and in the other Adam's jacket, which had been taken off at the doctor's, and which Girzie had carefully brought home.

"Guid e'en to ye, Meg Lindsay," she said in her abrupt way, and throwing the jacket on a chair. "Here's your man brak his arm; but dinna ye fash about it, for that winna mend it."

"It's the Lord's will, an' I bow my head."

"Ay, weel, that's a' that can be expectit frae ye. But ye can do something mair,

Jeanie, sae come awa an' let's see whar to put him."

She spoke in the same quick business-like manner in which she would have done if she had been delivering a load of fish. Mrs. Lindsay shuddered slightly, not at the dry tone, but at the, to her, implied profanity of Girzie's remark to Jeanie. She had her doubts about Girzie's spiritual welfare, and indeed the woman was not altogether so regular in her attendance at the kirk as she ought to have been. Many a reprimand she had received from the minister in consequence, but it seemed to have little or no effect upon her.

She bustled out now with Jeanie, and they found the cart drawn close up to the door. One man was holding up a lantern, whilst Gray and another were gently lifting Adam from the bundles of straw on which he had been laid. They carried him into the kitchen and placed him on his daughter's bed. He

had recovered consciousness, and was groaning with pain.

Girzie, in her sharp energetic way, turned the men out of the house, and then, with Jeanie's help, she made the injured man as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. When she had given him a dose of the mixture the doctor had sent, and given Jeanie all the doctor's instructions as to what she was to do for the patient, with a few of her own directions, she prepared to leave.

"That's a' we can dae for him enoo, and ye maun just bear up. I'll see how ye're getting on the morn or neist day."

She was moving to the door, and Jeanie was tearfully trying to thank her.

But Girzie did not seem to care about thanks, for in response she only muttered a dry, "Oo ay, that's a' richt," and proceeded to turn her patient cuddy's head to the road. When she had done that, she came suddenly back to Jeanie and held up the lantern so

that the light shone full upon the girl's face.

"Ye hae na heard aucht o' Jeames Falcon yet?" she asked.

Falcon had never been so far from Jeanie's thoughts as in that moment of her distress about her father, and the abruptness with which she was brought back to that all important subject, whilst the high wind was fluttering her garments about her, and the loud waves were booming in her ears their dark warnings from the sea, gave her something like a shock, and her countenance changed from the expression of subdued sorrow to one of quick alarm.

"No yet—hae ye?"

Girzie's features gave a queer twist, as if moved by some feeling of which pity and rage formed equal parts, the one preventing the other from predominating, and so presenting an anomalous expression.

"Na; I ken nae mair than that the *Colin*

hasna been heard o' since she sailed. But ye'll hae news sune enough, I doubtna. Guid nicht. Ye'd as weel send Robin Gray hame to Cairnieford noo, for it's gey an' late for a bachelor chiel' to be wi' ye, though he be an auld ane."

"Cairnieford! — he gaed awa a while syne."

"Na; for there's his powny tied to the buss at the end o' the house, though it's ower dark for ye to see. Guid nicht. Come awa, Dawnie, and mind your futting."

Dawnie was the cuddy's name, and Girzie led him away, walking at his head holding the lantern toward the earth for him to see, and talking to him as if he had been a human friend.

Girzie's light soon disappeared in the darkness, and Jeanie, who had been standing in a sort of dull reverie watching it, started, drawing her hand across her eyes in the manner of one awakening from a doze.

“I dinna ken what’s come ower me the nicht,” she said, staring blankly at the darkness, “but I just feel as I used to do when I was a wee wean and was frichted to gang to the byre after dark for fear o’ ghaists. Girzie’s a queer creatur’, but she couldna mean onything by what she said.”

As if to conquer her childish fear, she went to the end of the house, and found Robin Gray’s pony there, as Girzie had told her. She suspected at once where the owner might be found; and her suspicion was confirmed on entering the house, for she heard the farmer of Cairnieford’s genial voice speaking to her mother.

He did not stay long after he learned that Adam had fallen asleep. He spoke a few cheery words to the meek mother, and in the narrow little passage at the door he pressed Jeanie’s arm warmly—shaking hands was not a general custom amongst these folks. But Robin just took her arm as he was about to

pass out, and with an awkwardness that was very unusual for him, said—

“Jeanie, lass, I want ye to promise me ae thing.”

“What is it, Mister Gray?”

“That if ye should want for onything, and it’s mair nor likely you will, seeing how your faither’s laid up, and your mither’s hardly able to spin a wee at orra times, that ye’ll send for’t to Cairnieford, or at ony rate let me ken.”

She did not know why; but somehow she hesitated to give the promise his kindness solicited; and although they did not seem to have the slightest association with the matter, Girzie Todd’s words recurred to her, and with them came thoughts of Jeamie and the *Colin*.

“I dinna like to be fashin’ ye, Mister Gray——”

“Fashin’! Ye maunna say that again, Jeanie, unless ye want me never to come here ony mair.”

“Be it as you will then, Mister Gray.”

“That’s richt. But what gars ye ay ca’ me Mister Gray noo? ye didna use to do that when ye were a wee lassie, and I used to bring ye sweeties and whiles gie ye a ride on my powny. Od, it sounds queer in my lugs, when naebody ever ca’s me ought but Cairnieford or Robin Gray. I’m thinking, Jeanie, ye’re getting unco fine in your ways.”

And he smiled good-naturedly as he bade her good night, as if he were not altogether displeased to discover that she was different from other lasses, even in such a small matter as a form of address.

CHAPTER V.

THE FARMER OF CAIRNIEFORD.

“There’s auld Rob Morris that wons in yon glen,
He’s the king o’ guid fellows and wale o’ auld men :
He has gowd in his coffers, and owsen and kine,
And ae bonnie lassie, his darling and mine.”—*Burns*.

But the respectful distance Jeanie preserved in speaking to him was not so much on account of any idea of the politeness due from a poor fisherman’s daughter to a well-to-do farmer like him of Cairnieford, as on account of a certain shyness with which his own conduct had inspired her.

Robin Gray was not a man to hide any of the sentiments of his nature. If he liked a person he showed it, and if he disliked anybody he showed it quite as freely. For instance, he disliked the Laird of Clashgirn, and although McWhapple was the proprietor

of the lands Robin farmed, he had shown his contempt for him in various disagreeable ways. But Robin was the best farmer in the country, he had a well-stocked steading, and his rent was always ready at twelve o'clock on the term day. So the Laird lifted his rent, and whatever he might have felt or thought he said nothing.

On the other hand, Robin was fond of Jeanie. He had watched her growing up from a healthy bairn to a bonnie thrifty woman, and he had said to himself one day she would make a good wife to some honest chield. By what process of reasoning he arrived at the idea that he himself might be that honest chield, it is not easy to explain.

Usually such conclusions are obtained at a leap in defiance of logic—the reasoning, if it come at all, coming afterward, when it must perforce arrive at the result previously fixed upon. At any rate Robin got it into his head that he would dearly like Jeanie to

become mistress of Cairnieford. He had a "bein" house, he was not altogether an evil-disposed person, and although his years certainly did remove him from the category of youthful suitors—he being about thirty years her senior—still he was a hale hearty fellow, likely to last for thirty years more, and then he would be able to leave her well provided for.

Robin became conscious that there were a great many gray hairs in his head and amongst his whiskers. He had never till then realized the fact that he was growing old; and that fact, although it was not sufficiently powerful to make him forego his new desire, delayed the declaration which otherwise he would have made at once.

Every time he saw Jeanie he became more and more painfully sensible of the disparity of their years; more and more sensible of the ridicule which the folk would be apt to cast upon the "auld man and his young dearie."

He hesitated, and whilst he hesitated the passion of the man's heart was gaining that strength of love which makes a Hercules of a pigmy; that strength which overrides all other feelings, hopes, and aims, and blinds the lover to all consequences of good or ill.

He had not spoken of this to Jeanie or her parents, and he did not fancy that it was suspected by them. But the good dame had more than once thought to herself that her daughter might be mistress of Cairnieford if she liked, and that she might be couthie and comfortable there.

As for Jeanie, she noticed certain queer wistful looks with which Robin had lately regarded her, and although she was in no way vain, she suspected their meaning with intuitive delicacy. She tried by increased respect and distance in speaking to him to let him understand that any hopes he might have of winning her could never be realized. That was why she called him "mister," and

that was why she was almost afraid to accept any favour from him.

Robin did not comprehend this, and as his passion became stronger, and the difficulties in the way became consequently less in his eyes, the probability is that he would have spoken several weeks before Adam Lindsay's accident, had not James Falcon, two days previous to his conversation with the Laird, told Robin Gray that he was to marry Jeanie.

Falcon was puzzled by the quick way in which Robin asked him if the lassie had agreed; and then huskily wished him joy, and suddenly left him.

The farmer had gone home that day with a bowed head, a position in which nobody had seen him since his mother's burial, twenty years ago nearly. He took a good deal of toddy that night, and he got up next morning with a headache.

He went about the farm all day in such a

queer state that all his servants noticed that there was "something wrang wi' the maister." He was little better on the day following, and his housekeeper asked him if there was anything the matter. From that moment he got better, so far as outward appearance could indicate.

He had brought all the strength of a really strong and generous nature to bear upon the subject, and he had said to himself—

"Gif I can jist help to make her happy that'll be enough for me. If I can jist feel that I hae dune something to make her life smoother than it micht be without my help, an' I can see her noo and again smilin' and prosperous, that will satisfy me. Sae I'll help James Falcon to stock his farm, an' do what I can to prosper him, in spite o' that auld beggar the Laird."

When he had reached that kindly resolution, he was more at ease within himself, and the darkness which he had felt closing upon

him when the hope that had grown so strong was crushed, begun to lighten.

But Falcon did not get the farm, and before Robin had another opportunity of seeing him and offering that assistance which might have altered his whole plans, he was away in the *Colin* with Ivan Carrach.

When Robin heard the news—and Adam Lindsay was his informant—he was amazed and puzzled. But his determination did not swerve. He had no thought of taking advantage of his rival's absence. Plain and straightforward in act and thought, Falcon's absence or presence made no difference to him once Jeanie had given her word to become his wife.

He would wait till Falcon came back, and then he would set the young folk up; for James was an honest lad, and likely to do well. Meanwhile he could watch over Jeanie, and see her sometimes, and comfort her when she was in trouble. That was all the pleasure

he could hope for now, and he tried to be satisfied with it.

Never a word, never a hint of that old yearning which he was trying so bravely to bury in his heart, escaped him. He knew that Adam and his wife were friendly toward him, and that if he were only to speak, they would willingly use their influence with their daughter to persuade her to break off with Falcon; but Robin could not see how that would further her happiness, which was his chief object. Besides, he had a sturdy pride which would not permit him to rob another man of his promised wife, even if the lass were ready to be a party to the robbery, which she certainly would not be in the present case. He knew too that he had a sufficiently jealous disposition to make himself and his wife miserable, if he suspected that another lived who had a greater share in her thoughts than himself.

So he set himself sturdily to the task before

him; to make the most pleasure he could out of his wrecked hope and to further her happiness.

But Jeanie had only divined the nature of the passion with which he regarded her; she knew nothing of the sharp pangs with which he had first heard of her betrothal to Falcon; of the agony he had undergone, and the brave manhood which had lifted him above the meaner issues of human nature under such circumstances; and, consequently, she misinterpreted almost everything he said and did. On that account, when she gave her promise to apply to him whenever she might need help, she had no intention of troubling him unless dire necessity compelled her.

That dire necessity arrived much sooner than might have been expected. The morning after the storm was misty and unsettled; and although the wind had abated, the sea was still moving restlessly, and murmuring a doleful requiem over the mischief of the previous night.

Jeanie had been attending to her father all night, only obtaining an occasional nap on one of the wooden chairs which she had drawn close to the bed.

Adam was awake by daylight. He was feverish and thirsty; and Jeanie thought that the best thing for him would be a coggieful of new milk.

She went out to the byre, which was a thin shed of wood. She was not surprised to see that the storm had used it roughly. The door had been wrenched from its hinges, and lay broken upon the ground. But when she entered and found that crummie was gone, she stared about her, wondering where the cow could have got to. Crummie was a staid beast, and one not likely to break from her fastenings.

“The tether’s got loose some way, and seeing the door open, she’s gaen out to the grass,” was Jeanie’s thought.

She looked for the cow up and down the

road, but could not see her; and then she was afflicted with the thought that crummie had got into the water somehow, and beendrowned.

She ran down to the beach, but could not find any hoof marks. She ran back again to the byre; and again to the road. This time she observed on a soft piece of ground beside the long stalks of kale, some of which had been trampled down, the marks of crummie's hoofs leading to the road. What was most remarkable, she also observed here the impress of a man's feet. It was not until then that the idea of robbery entered her head, and it puzzled her greatly when it did. Hens had been stolen often by the tinkler gipsies who had been in the town on market-day; but to steal a whole cow, which could neither have its neck thrawn nor be hidden in an auld pock as a chuckie could, was a degree of audacity that she could only associate with the regular reivers, whose deeds she had been made acquainted with by old wives' gossip.

Stupified by this apparent loss, and not knowing how to act, she re-entered the house. Adam was groaning and grumbling miserably. Jeanie made him a drink with some oatmeal, and he asked for milk. She was obliged to tell him at once that she believed crummie had been taken away.

“Ta’en awa!” groaned Adam, looking as angrily at his daughter as if she had been an accomplice in the theft; “ta’en awa!—how could ony body take her awa?—she was na a wee thing to be jammed in a tinkler’s pouch.”

“Na, faither, but they hae jist gart her walk awa; and the storm was blawing sae loud that I heard nae disturbance.”

“The cow ta’en awa!” gasped the wounded man, writhing with pain: “it’s no possible.”

“May be sae, faither. I hope sae, and as soon as I hae made your breakfast I’ll gang out and look again.”

But although she looked again and again, it was without any better result. Adam

groaned and grumbled; bewailing the ruin that was falling upon him in his old age with a savage bitterness. Mrs. Lindsay was in a state of dumb consternation for a while, and when Jeanie managed to draw her into the kitchen on the big chair, she endeavoured to soothe her husband by telling him meekly it was the Lord's will.

Adam admitted that, but he only grumbled louder the more she tried to soothe him; and when Robin Gray arrived, he found Jeanie excited and troubled beyond measure.

He took the matter in hand at once. He consoled the guidwife with the help of a basket he had brought containing a lump of ham, a lot of eggs, and a bottle of real French brandy. He consoled Adam by telling him that he would find the cow or catch the thief.

"An' he'll be hanged," cried Adam, with a tone of satisfaction in spite of his pain: "an' serve him weel for robbin' a puir man like me."

Jeanie's excitement was certainly subdued, but her face was sad and weariful when she thanked Robin for all he had done.

"Whisht ye, lass," he said cheerfully. "Ye maunna speak o' that, and ye maunna be so downcast. Losh, it's roused your faither and done him a warld o' guid. He'll be out o' his bed in a day or twa. I'll gang down to Geordie Armstrong and set him after crummie."

Robin proceeded at once to the watchman, Geordie Armstrong, who was an old pensioner, and who represented in his own person the chief constable and entire force of the district, and was not a little proud of his position.

He took the matter up gravely, examined the premises with much precision, and then leisurely proceeded to seek the thief. But nobody was at all surprised that he discovered neither cow nor thief.

Adam was not able to leave his bed in a couple of days, as Robin had hopefully pre-

dicted; and the doctor said it would probably be months before he could use his arm again, and was doubtful if it would ever be quite right, seeing that such injuries are slow to heal in an old man.

Misfortune was falling fast and heavy upon the fisherman's house; and Jeanie shrunk from telling Robin the real state of affairs. Bad as he knew them to be, he did not know that she was killing the hens day by day to supply her parents with food, and that she was looking with terrible anxiety to a day that was close at hand, when she would have no means left of obtaining for them bare subsistence.

Only those who have felt what hunger is, who have experienced the bitter shame of utter poverty, can understand the agony the poor girl was suffering while she tended mother and father, striving to hide her own misery to lighten theirs.

CHAPTER VI.

FOES IN THE DARK.

“ When lightning parts the thunder cloud
That blackens all the sea,
And tempests sough through sail and shroud,
E'en then I'll think on thee.”—*Professor Wilson.*

James Falcon set himself bravely to the work in hand. The prize he had to win was for Jeanie; and for her sake there was no labour too great, no difficulty so huge, that he would not master it. He had said that the thought of her would give him strength; and it had been no idle utterance of passion; for he accomplished the work of two men on board the brig.

He wanted money, and he set himself with a fierce earnestness to gain it. Not that the money had any share in his thoughts on its own account; he thought only of the bright home it was to provide for him and Jeanie.

Ivan Carrach, with his great protruding calf's eyes, watched his new hand with a stolid stare. He found that instead of having to put him through an apprenticeship, Falcon was not only as thoroughly acquainted with a sailor's duty as any of the men on board, but had also some knowledge of navigation, as was apparent before two days had elapsed.

Whether the skipper was pleased or the reverse by this discovery it was impossible to guess, for his sodden features in their bush of red hair were as expressionless as a cow's. He spoke little, but he drank much. That, however, seemed to have no effect upon him, except to make his eyes roll more. The drink, which would have made a man of ordinary constitution incapable of standing or speaking, seemed to drop to Carrach's feet, and render them heavier and steadier than usual.

Hutcheson, the mate, told Falcon that

“the skipper was ay soberest when he was drunkenest.”

The truth of this paradox was illustrated in many ways; and whenever he had been drinking hardest, Carrach always exhibited the greatest care for the brig, and insisted most upon every man doing his duty. At such times he would make a tour of inspection, and wherever he found anything wrong or anything undone, the men were rated with a volley of oaths.

“Yor’re a set o’ lazy Hielan brutes—Petam,” was his usual peroration, apparently quite oblivious of his own nativity.

The hands on board numbered seven—the mate, Falcon, four other men, and a boy. Falcon observed that notwithstanding the skipper’s eccentric ways, the men seemed to like him.

He observed too, and with some chagrin, that the men had taken a dislike to himself, for what reason he could not imagine. From

the first hour that he had joined them he had been frank and friendly with them, as it was his nature to be with whoever he might be brought into contact. Yet they had not taken kindly to him from the first, and he soon became oppressed with the conviction that his comrades regarded him with suspicion and distrust, as if they fancied that he had come amongst them with no good intent.

On the fifth day out, and whilst a heavy fog was gathering around them, he reviewed his conduct, but he failed to discover anything in it which could promote ill-will amongst the men, unless they had taken a grudge against him for being so ready to take the place of the man who had refused to sail on the Friday.

That was the only ground upon which they could have founded their ill-humour, so far as he was able to make out. It seemed a poor ground for spite, seeing that even if the

man had sailed, Falcon would still have been with them. That there was spite he could not doubt, for it was displayed in many ways. The men seemed to shrink from him. If they were talking together, and he approached, the conversation instantly ceased, and the men who been laughing the moment before at some jest, moved away to their respective posts with sullen faces.

The mate, Hutcheson, was the only one who was at all friendly with him, and even he was frequently dry and reserved in speaking to him. It was a puzzle, and trying to solve it Girzie Todd's singular warning recurred to him. But that only made the puzzle appear the more intricate. So he spoke to the mate.

"What's wrang wi' the lads, Hutcheson; they seem to look on me as a kind of merman that had brought mischief aboard?"

"Aye, do they?" answered Hutcheson, as he coiled a rope. "Weel, ye see you're different

frae them. They feel as though ye werena just ane o' themsel's."

"What for should they think that? I gie them nae cause."

"Aye, maybe no; but ye see they ken ye're a frien' o' the owner's, and they maybe hae a notion that ye micht clash about ony on-goings that michtna be just according to rule."

"What! me?" cried Falcon laughing. "Weel, if they only ken'd how little friendship there is atween the Laird and me, and in what way we parted, they would soon get rid of that notion."

"I'm glad to hear ye say't," answered Hutcheson, more freely than he had yet spoken; "for even the skipper himsel' was disposed to think ye were here to keep an e'e on a' thing, and himsel' in particular."

"Deil tak' him, did he think I would come here as a spy for ony man? I'll set that richt."

Falcon was indignant at the idea of having

been regarded as a spy, and he told the mate his reasons for going to sea, and how he had quarrelled with the Laird. He afterwards spoke to his comrades, and his explanation produced a better understanding between them than there had been since he had joined them.

He spoke to the skipper later in the day, not quite so frankly, perhaps, as he had done to the mate and the others, for Carrach had not made a favourable impression on him.

Ivan listened in his stolid way, rolling his eyes all the while, and when he had finished, said gruffly—

“You’ll pe all the petter liked for no peing what we thocht. Yes, Pe-tam. Hae a drink?”

Falcon declined the horn cup which was tendered to him half full of brandy and water; but he was glad to think that he was likely to have a smooth course with his comrades. The expectation was soon dispelled.

The fog had been deepening all afternoon, and Carrach had been keeping pace with the fog in drinking—that is, the blacker the fog grew the more he drank.

Toward evening, whilst a man named Donald was at the helm, the brig was suddenly overshadowed by some black mass ahead, much denser than the fog. Falcon sprung aft, and before Donald could utter a word had ported the helm, and as the brig veered from her course she grated along the side of a huge vessel which crawled slowly by.

There was a moment of breathless consternation; then wild shouts from those on board the unknown vessel and the hands of the brig. A babble that rose above the lashing of waves and the creaking of timbers; and with it a confused rush of feet.

The danger was over when Carrach got on deck. He swore at everybody, and then he took Falcon aside, and asked him to explain

what had happened. The absurdity of first making a row, and then asking for an explanation, did not strike Falcon at the moment, and he briefly told him that being forward he had observed the black shadow; suspected what it was, and, fearing that Donald might not observe it until too late on account of the darkness, he had hastened to the helm.

None of his comrades had heard what he was saying, but they were standing in a group round Donald, casting sullen glances toward Falcon, as if suspecting that he was blaming them.

Carrach advanced to Donald with his eyes rolling and a string of oaths on his tongue, although his face was stolid as usual.

"What ta deevil did you'll mean by quitting your helm?" he growled.

"I didna quit the helm," answered Donald, surlily.

"It's a tam lee,—oich! but you'll tell me that to my face whan here's Falcon, wha

saved us frae going to smash all together, told me that you was not there."

"It's a lee he's telling," shouted Donald and his two mates.

"I never said so," cried Falcon, breaking in indignantly; "and you know it, Carrach. I told you that Donald was at his post, but the fog prevented him from seeing the danger so soon as I did."

Carrach turned his eyes upon him, not in the slightest degree disturbed by the flat contradiction of his falsehood.

"Did you'll no told me that Donald was awa frae the helm whan you took hold of her?"

"No," retorted Falcon, as much amazed by the man's placidity as by the apparently objectless lie.

"Well, all I say is that what you'll told me standing ayont there was not like what you'll told me noo. Come doon stair, Donald; an' hae a spoke wi' me."

"Bide a minute," said Falcon, confronting him, "bide a minute, Ivan Carrach, and hearken to me. I'm no a fool, and I'm no blind. I hae seen that the lads here had some ill-will against me. I ken noo wha has made that ill-will, though I cannot tell what for."

"What is't you'll mean?" demanded Carrach, his dirty fat hands swinging like two weights by his sides.

"This is what I mean, mates," addressing the men, although still confronting the master, "our skipper wants to make ill-blood atween you and me, whatever reason he has for't; but before ye condemn me, mind this—I never said a bad word of ony o' ye, and I never thought of doing so."

"Did you'll ken what you was doing enow?" queried Ivan, rolling his eyes in the fashion of a cow chewing a sweet cud.

"Telling the truth."

"Maybe so, but you'll be also making ta

mutiny on ta high seas, and the law says a man wha'll be make the mutinies shall be hanged—Pe-tam—so shust mind what you're about, my praw lad."

He pushed by him and rolled down to his cabin, followed by Donald.

When the latter returned to the deck he regarded Falcon with a sullen growl, as if he had been satisfied of his attempt to defame him. He apparently succeeded in convincing his comrades also, for in a short while the brown faces of the men were darkened with suppressed passion. More than one of them uttered an ejaculation of anger when he rubbed shoulders with Falcon.

Hutcheson, however, was still friendly, and after he had left the helm—which he had taken when Donald had gone down with the skipper—he whispered to Falcon—

"I heard what ye said to the skipper, and I ken that what ye tauld the lads was true.

But what the deil he's drivin' at I canna make oot."

"Then why did you not speak when you heard him telling the lie?"

Hutcheson shrugged his shoulders.

"There was nae use making bad waur. The lads, being prejudiced against ye, would hae believed him in spite of us baith. Sae that it would hae dune ye nae guid, and maybe it would hae dune me harm. But for a' that I'll speak a word for ye when it's needed."

That seemed to Falcon a kind of back-handed way of doing justice, but he said no more. The puzzle he had found on board the *Colin* was becoming so hopelessly involved that he saw little prospect of solving it. The falsehood of Carrach seemed as purposeless as the prejudice of the men was groundless; yet both threatened to give him much trouble.

He did not turn into his hammock that

night at his usual hour, but lay down on a heap of canvas near the forecastle hatch. He was out of humour and depressed; he wished to be alone; he did not care to be amongst his comrades in his present mood; and so seeing the canvas there he stretched himself upon it instead of going down the hatchway to his hammock. It was one of those trivial acts which in nine hundred and ninety-nine instances is never remembered, because it bears no issue, but in which the thousandth instance is fraught with gravest consequences.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATE OF THE "COLIN."

"I left thee in sorrow;
But, oh, on the morrow,
I cherish'd the hope thee again I wad see."
—*J. G. Cumming.*

A heavy wind was sweeping the dense fog before it, so that about midnight stars became visible. Falcon lay watching them, thinking of Jeanie, and finding some comfort in the thought that those same stars were looking down on her. That was a link between them in spite of all the waste of land and sea which separated them.

Somehow the fortune he was seeking—and it was not a big one, only enough to stock a small farm—had never seemed so far from him as it did to-night. The difficulties he had to surmount were sterner, the chances of

success fewer, than they had ever appeared before. But he was not losing courage: he had not the remotest thought of yielding; he was only a little weary, and rested by the wayside to calculate what a short space he had journeyed on the long road he had yet to traverse.

The brig was cutting through the water with a swishing sound, the wind was whistling shrilly through the rigging, when suddenly her very timbers seemed to quiver with the sharp cry which rose upon the night.

“FIRE!”

Falcon bounded to his feet, and ran toward the mate's berth, whence the cry proceeded.

He met Hutcheson frenziedly rushing with a bucket for water. Falcon seized another bucket, and having filled it, followed Hutcheson to his berth. An old sea chest in which various stores were kept was in a blaze. They emptied the water upon it, and, with the speed of men who knew that their lives de-

pended upon their exertions, procured more. The flame had not obtained any hold on the surrounding wood-work, so that they had succeeded in extinguishing it with half a dozen bucketsful of water, by which time they were joined by Carrach, Donald, and two others.

The skipper was dressed exactly as he had been during the day. He had either not gone to bed at all, or he had lain down with his clothes on. He held a large lantern in one of his hands, and with its light he surveyed the men around him.

"What way did all this come about?" he growled, "and wha's been trying to burn us all?"

"I dinna ken how it happened," replied Hutcheson excitedly. "I was turning in after my watch, and when I came here I found the kist bleezing. If I'd been three minutes later there would have been nae chance o' getting it out, for yon jar o' oil would hae been afire,

and then we micht hae said guid nicht to the *Colin*."

"Did you'll leave nothing that could hae started the fire!"

"Naething. The place was a' richt when I was here for some oil about half an hour syne."

"Then here's what I hae gotten to say," broke in Donald, clenching his fist furiously, and looking hard at Falcon; "there's some damned scoon'rel amang us that wants to work mischief tae us a', and if I had my will I'd hae Jeames Falcon boun' hand and foot, an' see if there was ony mair cantrips played us after that."

"And what for would we do that?" said Carrach.

"Because he's the only ane that was out o' his hammock when he ought to hae been in it. He hasna been i' the forecastle the nicht."

Even Hutcheson looked suspiciously at Falcon now. The latter admitted that he had

not gone below, and tried to explain, but the explanation appeared weak and untruthful to those who heard it. Falcon's indignation only made matters worse.

The skipper closed the dispute.

"We'll no touch him this time, lads, so go about your business all o' you: but if any more tam nonsense goes on we'll put him in airns, we will—Pe-tam."

Carrach rolled back to his cabin, which was close to the mate's berth. Donald and his two comrades went forward muttering darkly, and Hutcheson shut his door.

Falcon understood by that movement that the one friend he had on board had turned against him like the rest. He moved slowly away, his brain feverishly excited as much by the danger they had escaped as by the singular manner in which circumstances seemed to conspire against him.

He halted by the mast, and leaning against it, his hand clutching one of the ropes to

steady himself, he stood there with the strong wind beating upon his cheeks whilst he tried to bring his thoughts into shape.

One idea he grasped firmly, that Carrach had some mysterious purpose for the bold lies he had told; and also for refusing to adopt Donald's suggestion. But what could that purpose be?

He had been half an hour trying to answer the question, when he suddenly bent forward and peered eagerly through the dim light toward some bulky object which had crawled out from the entrance to the skipper's cabin.

The object crawled along the deck to the hatchway of the hold,—raised the hatch cautiously, and disappeared.

Falcon darted down to the cabin. The door was open, but the place was quite dark. He groped about, and assured himself that Carrach was not there.

Up the ladder again, and he shook the door of the mate's crib.

"Hutcheson, get up, man, quick," he said in a sharp undertone.

In a moment Hutcheson opened the door.

"What the deil's wrang noo," he said ill-humouredly when he saw who had roused him.

"Speak low. I hae discovered the mischief-maker."

"Eh? Then it's no yoursel'?"

"Come and see."

He led him over to the main hatch and bade him stand close behind it. They waited nearly a quarter of an hour, and the mate was becoming impatient. He was on the point of asking angrily what Falcon meant, when the hatch was raised slightly from below, then stopped, as if the person who had raised it were looking for a clear course.

Falcon gripped his companion's arm to impose silence.

The hatch was pushed up farther, and a dark object crawled out. As soon as the

hatch closed Falcon stepped over it and planted himself before the man.

Ivan Carrach stood upright then, and drew from under his jacket his lantern, the light of which he had been concealing. His big ball-like eyes rolled fiercely upon Falcon. Then he reached out his hand and grasped him by the throat.

“So,” he growled in a thick husky voice, “I’ll hae got you at it again, my praw lad. You’ll hae been watchin’ me maybe, but you’ll got the worst o’ that—Pe-tam.”

He was about to raise an alarm when he saw the mate, who was staring at him in a puzzled way.

Carrach seemed dumbfounded, and then his whole manner changed. He released Falcon.

“You was there with him, Hutcheson?” he said in his ordinary stolid manner.

“Aye, I’m here.”

“Oich, then, it was all richt. I was feart

when I saw him there alone that there was something wrang again. I hae been making a round to see that all was safe."

"Aye; but ye hae a queer way o' gaun about it, as though ye were feart o' being seen."

"So I was. I did not want onybody to know, because if onybody did know I wouldno hae found them out."

"And was all safe below?"

"Yes—aye, all safe. You can roost again. It's all richt—Pe-tam."

He made for his cabin with a speed he had never displayed before.

Falcon and Hutcheson looked at each other, but spoke no word. Hutcheson moved slowly to his berth. Falcon followed. At the door they stopped.

"I want to bide wi' you the nicht, Hutcheson," said Falcon.

The mate nodded assent, and they entered. Falcon seated himself on a small box and leaned his back against the side of the door.

The mate, before lying down on his narrow couch, closed the door, and they were in darkness.

The brig rocked under the heavy wind, and the waters lashed its sides angrily. After half an hour of silence, Falcon spoke.

“Are you sleeping, Hutcheson?”

“No. Confound it, I canna sleep, whatever’s the matter wi’ me.”

“You’ll not forget the way he crawled out of the hold, trying to hide the lantern?”

“No likely.”

“And you’ll not forget the confused way he answered you?”

“No.”

“And, most important of all, you’ll not forget that he assured you twice that all was safe?”

“I’ll mind a’. But what are ye thinking about?”

“*That Carrach does not want the ‘Colin’ to make her voyage.*”

"What?" and the mate started as the words were whispered in his ear. But the shock only lasted for a moment. "Hoots, ye're haverin' noo."

And he lay down again. Falcon made no response, and there was silence between them for another half-hour. At the expiry of that time Hutcheson put his feet on the floor and rose to a sitting posture.

"Deevil tak' me if I can get a wink o' sleep," he muttered discontentedly. "What wi' thinking about ae thing and anither I'm a' out in a sweat. I'm as drouthy as a fish, an' I feel as if the place was het as an oven."

"Will I open the door? That will give us air and light too, for it must be near day-break."

"Od, I would think sae" (yawning and stretching himself). "It seems a lang while since ye spoke last, and yet it canna be mair nor an hour—MY GOD, WHAT'S THAT?"

Falcon had thrown open the door, which

admitted a faint light, sufficient to enable them to see the outline of each other's persons when they stood opposite the doorway. Both were standing so now, listening to the sound which had excited Hutcheson's exclamation, and caused them to spring to their feet at the same moment.

It was a peculiar hissing and spluttering sound like that produced by throwing water on fire. The rocking of the brig, the bluster of the wind, and the roar of the waves, had prevented them hearing it sooner.

Hutcheson darted outside, and looked eagerly round. He could see nothing; but the heat he had felt inside his cabin was perceptible on the deck also. He shouted to the man at the rudder and the look-out—was there anything wrong? The answer came from both—no. Suddenly the helmsman added:—

“There's a queer soun' somewhar that I canna make out.”

Falcon seized the mate's arm. They regarded each other fixedly, and the same idea seemed to have struck both, for they rushed together to the main hatchway.

They lifted the hatch together, and a dense volume of smoke rushed upward, blinding them. They dropped the hatch immediately and drew back, rubbing their eyes. Hutcheson's face was white as a sheet, and his body shivering.

"She's bleezing like hell," he gasped.

Hutcheson was a stout-hearted fellow, and he had been wrecked twice, but he was so overwhelmed with consternation at the sight of the hold in flames, that for the moment he was powerless to move when action, prompt and decisive, was most needed.

Falcon was the cooler of the two—probably because his experience did not enable him to realize so quickly the full horror of the position.

"Call the men—try the buckets—there

may be a chance yet," he shouted, and the mate started as if a trumpet had sounded the call to duty in his ears.

He hallooed to the helmsman and the lookout, giving them rapid orders to rouse their comrades and the skipper. The one word "fire!" acted like an electric shock upon the men, and they rushed wildly to obey the command.

Hutcheson and Falcon had got the buckets ready by the time the crew, half dressed and with pallid startled faces, joined them. Even at that moment, when one terrible element of destruction was threatening to cast them upon the mercy of another, the men regarded Falcon with looks of savage hate and suspicion. He was the man who had betrayed them to the approaching doom.

But there was no time for words. The hissing and spluttering sounds had become louder and louder, the heat of the deck intense, and when Carrach appeared—dressed

as the mate and Falcon had last seen him—a broad tongue of flame shot up through the hatchway.

"Pe-tam!" was all he said; and in a second he was amongst the crew working with as much will, apparently, as any, and with a great deal more stolid calmness.

Hutcheson and Falcon had been the first to dip the buckets; and the water was passed from hand to hand with a rapidity which only men making a desperate effort for life could have exhibited.

They worked madly and in silence. Car-rach stood nearest the fire, as stolid in the presence of death as he would have been sitting in safety before a dram-bottle.

But ten minutes sufficed to prove, even to his dull intellect, that their work was hopeless. The flame, suppressed at one point, burst forth more furiously at another. The timbers were crackling, seething, and spluttering under their feet: and it was manifest

that the fire had obtained such hold of the vessel as would defy their most desperate exertions to extinguish it.

The morning haze was presently illumed by a broad glare of light that was reflected in the waters around them, so that they seemed to be encompassed by a sea of flame. The relentless fire had greedily seized upon the ribs of the brig, the deck, the masts, and the rigging. Dense gusts of smoke rolled upward, enveloping the men, blinding and blackening them. The smoke was followed by broad flames that shot out fiery tongues toward them with the hissing sound of a thousand venomous snakes.

A portion of the deck fell crashing downward into the fiery pit; and then the wind caught up the flame and smoke and swept them across the vessel with a roaring wrath that deafened and dazed the wretched victims.

Bright flames gathering strength and vol-

ume around them, a wide dark sea beyond, and a gloomy haze obscuring the sky overhead, the men stood face to face with death in its most horrible form, and despair seized them. As with one accord they cast down the buckets and gave up the strife.

"Out wi' the boats," cried Donald; and the men, not caring who gave the order, snatched at the hope which the words held out to them, and rushed with hoarse mad shrieks to the boats.

There were two; but one of them was already in the grasp of the fire; the other was lowered instantly. Hutcheson cast into it a small barrel of biscuits, Donald a barrel of water, and Carrach, from some unknown quarter, produced a keg of brandy. He was not making the least effort to direct the crew. In his heavy way he was now entirely occupied in attending to his own safety, leaving the others to take care of their own respectively.

He was the first in the boat, Hutcheson the last but one, and as soon as he had descended, Donald shouted wildly:

“Put aff—there’s room for nae mair.”

Falcon was bending over the side of the brig, about to slip down the rope, when this order was given.

Two men raised oars to obey, but Hutcheson pushed one of them roughly back, and held firmly by the rope.

“No, damn ye,” he shouted, with a savageness of look and voice the effect of which his begrimed visage heightened, “ye sha’ not leave a man that’s done his duty as weel’s the best o’ ye to die while there’s a chance o’ rescue. Come on, Falcon.”

“It was him set the brig a-lowe,” cried Donald doggedly.

“It’s a lee,” retorted Hutcheson, holding fast by the rope.

“The compass and the log,” shouted Carrach, rousing suddenly, “ye hae time yet,

Falcon—they're in my berth—there's no chance for us without the compass."

Falcon was willing to perform any act, however fool-hardy, that might satisfy the men he was innocent of the crime attributed to him. With an idea that he would obtain this result by showing his readiness to risk his life for theirs, he disappeared from the bulwark at once to comply with the skipper's command.

He did not hear Hutcheson hallooing after him to come back, in the hope of checking him in the rash venture he had too readily undertaken. It was certainly an act of such fool-hardiness as only the excitement of the occasion rendered it possible for a sane man to attempt.

In flame and smoke he disappeared, and the crew, who had been only a moment before ready to push off without him, now waited in breathless silence for his return. Hutche-

son held the rope, and watched eagerly for the least sign of his coming.

Meanwhile the greedy flames, fanned to fury by the wind, were rapidly devouring the brig. With a loud crash the mainmast toppled over, and fell like a huge firebrand into the water. Luckily it went over the larboard side, or it might have crushed the small boat and its freight.

The rocking of the craft at this juncture seemed to intimate that she was settling down. This time Carrach spoke.

“You’ll better hold awa’, lads, or we’ll go doon wi’ the suction o’ her.”

“Aye, aye, put aff,” shouted Donald gruffly; “there’s nae use throwing awa seven lives for the sake o’ ane. We can stand clear eneuch to be safe oursel’s, an’ if Falcon shows up he can loup, and we can pick him up. Let go, Hutcheson.”

“Haud on a minute yet,” was the mate’s uneasy answer, clutching the rope tightly, as

he raised his voice and shouted with all his pith to Falcon.

The brig gave an ominous lurch toward them, and the crew yelled in chorus to Hutcheson to let go. He had no option now, for even if he had been disposed to continue faithful to Falcon in opposition to his comrades, he could not, for the rope had caught fire, and dropped down to his hand.

With another yell the men pulled away from the *Colin*. What was the life of one man to them weighed in the balance against their own? It is in such terrible moments as these that the best and worst natures show themselves pure and undisguised.

They were, however, so far willing to serve the absent man that they ceased rowing as soon as they had got beyond danger of the whirlpool the brig would make in sinking.

They had scarcely done so when there was an explosion like the outburst of a thunderbolt, and they were covered with a shower of

sparks and flaming splinters. The body of the brig had been burst open, and reeling backward from the shock, her bow rose out of the water, and she plunged down stern first.

By the time the crew had rubbed their eyes, and the black clouds of smoke had been sufficiently dispersed by the wind to enable them to see, barrels, spars, torn pieces of charred wood-work and portions of rigging were all that was left of the *Colin*.

“Oich, it was shust the barrel o’ pooter in my cabin gied that last blaw,” said Carrach, rubbing his face with his sleeve; “and if Falcon did mak’ the lowe, he’s paid for it noo. So let’s forget and forgive—Pe-tam. Row awa, lads, we’re no far frae land.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEWS BROUGHT HOME.

“Dark lowers the night o’er the wide stormy main,
Till mild rosy morning rise cheerful again ;
Alas ! morn returns to revisit the shore,
But Connel returns to his Flora no more.”—*A. Wilson.*

The healthy bloom had faded from Jeanie’s cheeks, and left behind a weary expression that made her appear five years older than she had done on the day the *Colin* sailed. Anxieties were pressing heavily upon her ; the strife for bare subsistence had come. She met the struggle with a brave heart at first, and by daybreak she was spinning, knitting hose, or making nets.

But as day by day the difficulties seemed to increase rather than diminish, in spite of all her labour, her heart begun to sicken and sink.

Worse still, Adam, who complained much whilst obliged to keep his bed, was still more discontented with his lot when he had sufficiently recovered to be able to sit by the fire-side, and on fine days at the door. Hunger and pain make a short temper, and not seeing that Jeanie was doing anything more than he had a right to expect from a daughter, he was apt to speak harsh words to her at times; to utter impatient ejaculations when she was dressing his wound, and to complain of her unskilfulness.

She was worried alike by this impatience and the daily shifts for food, until at last her own temper began to break bounds, and she once or twice resented his complaints. But this was only when, wearied out by her exertions, the carping of her father irritated her beyond measure. Even then her resentment went no further than saying—

“Deed, faither, I think ye ought to be thankfu’ it’s nae waur. An’ I’m sure I

dae a' that I can, and yet it winna satisfy ye."

Then she would quit him, and relieve herself by cleaning up the house with a spiteful sort of vigour, finding apparently some comfort in rattling the dishes, and praying fervently for Jeamie's return.

"It's worry, worry, worry, morn, noon, and night," she would say to herself; "and there doesna seem ony getting the better o't."

To crown all, the Laird of Clashgirn called twice about the rent, and there was not a farthing wherewith to help to pay him. Then indeed any life seemed preferable to the life of misery she was leading—misery which all her strength seemed unable to alleviate.

Yet she knew that there was willing and kindly help at hand if she would only ask it. But knowing nothing of Robin Gray's generous resolution, she had strained every nerve to conceal as much of the real distress of the family as possible. Homely and simple as

she was, she possessed enough of that sensitive nature which shrinks from help when it is most needed; because then it seems so like charity, notwithstanding the fact that help in need is help indeed.

No doubt the fancy that Robin Gray's regard was more that of a lover than of a mere friend was the leading cause of her reserve towards him, and rendered the acceptance of favours from him the more unpleasant, because she felt that they were favours she could never requite as he might desire. She wronged the man by the thought; but how could she know that?

Although he was not aware of the full extent of her difficulties, he knew enough to prompt him to seek every opportunity of relieving them. But he saw that somehow his anxiety to be of service seemed to trouble her. From that moment his desire was restrained, and he was sorely puzzled what to do for her, and how to do it.

“Better the day, Adam?” said Cairnieford, coming up one bright morning.

The fisherman was seated by the door in the sunlight. His arm was still in splints, and his sallow face with stubble-covered chin and blue lips betokened his feeble condition.

“Oo aye, better, Cairnieford, thank ye; that is, as weel as can be expeckit in a man as sarely fashed as me, and no able to wark. The doctor says it’ll be a while yet afore I get the use o’ my arm.”

“But ye’re gettin’ on brawly for a’ that, and ye’ll come round in time.”

He heard the busy hum of Jeanie’s wheel, and he glanced eagerly in that direction; so that he did not at first observe the deep wrinkles which gathered on Adam’s brow. The voice, however, harsh and husky, recalled his attention.

“Ah! in time, nae doubt. But Lord kens what we’re to do biding that time.”

“What’s wrang, man, what’s wrang?”

“Everything’s wrang—the cow gane, the auld wife getting waur an’ waur, mysel’ in this condition, and Jeanie wrought clean aff her feet withoot making ony better o’t. Isna that eneuch to make a man that was never auchtin onyane a penny till noo sour as a crab apple? An’ to back it a’, there’s the Laird hirplin’ here day after day about his rent, and nae way that I ken o’ to pacify him.”

Adam’s tongue, once loosened on the subject, soon revealed the whole state of affairs.

“Hoots, man, what way did ye no let me ken a’ that afore?” said Robin. “I could hae set your mind at ease without ony fash.”

“I ken that, Cairnieford,” and Adam’s withered visage was lightened; “but Jeanie was ay bidding me bear my ain load, an’ her mither backit her, an’, to tell the truth, I never cared mysel’ to be beholden to onybody.”

“Aye, but you’ll except me, Adam” (lower-

ing his voice and bending down). "Just say naething about it and I'll settle wi' the Laird, though I'd rather deal wi' onybody but him since we had that dispute about the march fence. But I'll make it a' richt."

Adam gave him a grateful look.

"Thank ye, Cairnieford. I'll be able to pay ye back——"

"We'll talk about that again. Guid day. I'll be back the morn."

And Robin, eager to avoid thanks, hurried away, without even waiting to see Jeanie, lest she should object to the new service he was about to render her.

At the steading of Clashgirn he found Girzie Todd's cuddy cart, and Girzie herself was busy haggling with Mrs. Begg about the price of some fish. At the head of the cuddy, one of his arms thrown round its neck, and the other holding up a bundle of hay and thistles, was Girzie's son Wattie.

"Eat awa, Dawnie, for ye dinna ken whan

ye'll get ony mair to eat," Wattie was saying, coaxing the cuddy and addressing it, as his mother was in the habit of doing, with as much earnestness as if it had been human.

He was a fair-haired lad—or rather man, for he was as old as James Falcon, and much about the same height and build—with a healthy look. But he had a very marked squint in his eyes, and a certain vacant stare, which betrayed the natural.

Although a man in appearance, he had all the characteristics of a child. And chief amongst them was his terror of being left anywhere by his mother. He was never at ease except when hanging at her skirts; and when on occasions she found it necessary to leave him at home, he would sit moping in a corner until she returned, unless he was moved to perpetrate some childish freak of mischief. Next to his mother, he was attached to Dawnie. These two represented to his weak mind protection and safety. He

shrunk away from men as if afraid of them. With children he would fain have been friendly, but they made fun of him too often, and mocked him. Lassies of his own years were always as ready as the bairns to make fun of him, although in a different way. Jeanie Lindsay was the only one of them who had treated him with sincere kindness, and consequently she obtained the next place to Dawnie in his estimation.

His jacket and trousers were somewhat tattered; but they bore evidences of having been well patched. His mother had lately bought him a new bonnet, and of that he was so proud that he scarcely ever wore it: preferring to carry it daintily in his pouch or under his arm.

“The laddies would be wantin’ to take it frae me an’ file it,” was his answer, with a sly grin, to a remonstrance from Jeanie.

And it was true that the mischievous urchins of Portlappoch would have enjoyed

amazingly the pleasure of making a football of Wattie's new bonnet, and of seeing him run wildly about trying to snatch it from them. They had done it with his old one.

Girzie caught sight of Gray as he approached, and closed the bargain at once with Mrs. Begg by submitting to her offer, much to that worthy woman's amaze, for Girzie was never known to yield a bawbee without a hard contest.

"Weel, weel, Mrs. Begg, just tak' them at your ain price," she said on this occasion, "but ye's never get fish like them again at the siller. Come awa, Wattie."

She seized Dawnie's bridle and led him down the road with as much speed as a few smart thuds with her stump of a whip handle could enforce.

"Guid day to ye," said the farmer passing.

"Bide a wee, Cairnieford," she said, "there's ill news came hame this fine mornin' for some folk ye care about."

“What news and whatna folk, guid-wife?”

He looked at her with some surprise, for there was perceptible in her usual brusque manner a degree of agitation.

“The news is that the *Colin* has been brunt at sea, and Jeames Falcon has been droont or brunt wi’ her.”

“Heaven save’s, woman, what are ye saying?”

“What’s ower true, I’m thinking. Ivan Carrach landed here this morning wi’ the news, and he’s up wi’ the Laird enoo.”

“But—are ye sure that Falcon’s lost?”

“Speer at the Laird,” she said drily, and was moving on.

“But how do you ken this?”

“It’s nae matter hoo I ken; speer at the Laird an’ Carrach if it binna true, and syne ye can tell Jeanie.”

Robin Gray’s heart leapt into his mouth at the tidings; and his first thought had been

simply of the new affliction this would bring to Jeanie. His second thought was in a degree selfish, for out of the new misfortune he saw a way by which all her sorrow might be relieved. But when Girzie suggested that he should be the bearer of the fatal news, he started from it in as much alarm as if she had asked him to set fire to the cottage.

“Na, Girzie, I canna do that—I canna do’t. But ye’re a frien’ to baith her an’ me. Gang doon that way and let her ken o’t, puir lassie, if you’re sure it’s true. I’ll see the Laird and Carrach, and if it’s no true I’ll owertak ye. Break it to her kindly, for I’m feart it’ll do her harm.”

“I’ll do your bidding, Cairnieford, for the sake o’ the kind word and gowpen o’ meal ye hae ay had for my Wattie. Dinna fear for Jeanie. She’s young and hearty an’ she’ll get ower’t a’ before lang; an’ it’s an ill wind fills naebody’s sail, even though there be a smell o’ brimstone intil’t.”

Nodding her head, and with a queer grin that had something sad and cynical in it, she strode after Wattie and the cuddy.

Robin Gray insisted peremptorily on seeing the Laird at once. The Laird was so much surprised by the visit—for Gray, although his tenant and neighbour, had not been in the house for years—that he desired him to come ben to the parlour.

Carrach was sitting bolt upright on a chair near the table, upon which his dirty fat hands were resting in proximity to a decanter full of whisky. His shaggy hair was redder and bristlier than ever, and his ox eyes were rolling more stolidly.

The Laird was very much as usual, dry and respectable.

“Glad to see ye, Cairnieford,” he said, taking a huge pinch of snuff, smiling and nodding affably, “an’ houp ye’ll no be siccan a stranger as ye hae been. Will ye hae a dram?”

“No, thank ye; I’m for nae drams in this house——”

“Aweel, man, aweel, ye needna be sae thrawn. Ye’re welcome here, an’ ye’d hae been mair welcome if ye’d come to tell me that bygones were to be bygones atween us. Since it’s no that, whatna wind has blawn ye this airt?”

“No my ain will, ye may be sure o’ that, Laird; although for that matter byganes are byganes wi’ me, sae far that I hae nae thocht o’ raking them up. I came here to pay ye this six pounds for Adam Lindsay’s rent, and when ye hae gien me a quittal for’t, I hae a question to speer at ye.”

The Laird took another pinch of snuff, examining his impatient and excited visitor shyly with his sleek pale eyes. Evidently cogitating on some new subject for speculation, he took down an inkstand from the mantelpiece, procured half a sheet of note-

paper from a drawer, and sat down to write the receipt.

“Od, it’s extraordinar’!” he exclaimed, with his eyes fixed on the paper; “and so you’re going to pay Adam Lindsay’s rent? Weel, Adam’s an honest chiel, an’ he’s got a bonnie daughter.”

“Here are the notes,” said Robin briefly, throwing them down. “Count them.”

“Oh, they’re a’ right, I hae no doubt;” and, as if to prove his perfect confidence, he proceeded to count them and examine the watermarks with miserly care. “Ye were saying there was a question——”

“Aye,” interrupted Robin, turning to Carrach. “I want to ken if it’s true that the *Colin* has been lost, and that James Falcon has gane down wi’ her.”

The Laird produced his large silk handkerchief, and blew his nose with sonorous grief.

Carrach’s eyes rolled up to the farmer’s face, but his lips did not move.

"It's my great misfortune to hae to confirm the news ye hae heard," answered the Laird, with a whining drawl. "It's true—though wha told ye I canna guess, seeing that I didna ken mysel' twa or three minutes syne. The brig was ane o' the best that ever sailed the sea, but she was burnt, and my puir frien', wha was trying to save the papers and log, was either killed wi' the explosion o' a barrel o' powder, or was drowned. Isna that the way o't, Carrach?"

"Oich aye," muttered the skipper, emptying a glass, "he was a prave lad, but the splosion was too strong for him—Pe-tam."

Robin, after gazing a moment from one to the other of the men, suddenly brought his heavy hand down on the table with a force that made inkstand, decanter, and glasses dance.

"Mind this, McWhapple"—he never called him "Laird" when angry with him. "It's no the first time you and me hae had un-

pleasant dealings. Thank Heaven, I dinna need to care a snap o' my thumb for ye; and I tell ye this, I'll hae the affair looked into, and if there has been ony wrang-doing, I'll find it out."

"Od, it's extraordinar'," ejaculated the Laird, as if his pity for the man's intemperate passion excluded all idea of resenting the insult. "Ye speak as though I would be likely to set my ain house in a lowe about my lugs. But ye shall hae a' the information anent the melancholy business that the insurance agent, lawyer Carnegie, and mysel' can mak' out."

Robin did see that he had spoken harshly; but he made no further apology than this:—

"I'll be thankful for the information, and I hope that wi' what I can learn mysel', it may alter my present opinions. But you ken and I ken, McWhapple, that there are reasons why I should doubt your word—especially when it concerns James Falcon."

Carrach, stolid as an ox, stared and drank. The Laird took an extra pinch. Robin quitted the house.

But he did not attempt to overtake Girzie Todd.

CHAPTER IX.

A ROMANCE OF THE MIDDLE AGE.

“Oh, wha wad buy a silken gown
Wi’ a puir broken heart?
Or what’s to me a siller croun,
Gin frae my love I part?”—*S. Blamire.*

“Drooned?”

She repeated the word in a low frightened voice, shrinking from it, and yet repeating it, as if she were trying to realize its full import by echoing the sound. Her hands were clasped helplessly on her breast. Her eyes looked vacantly across the sea, as if seeking some explanation in the dim distance. She was pitiably dazed and quiet. There was no violent outcry; not the least symptom of hysterics—only that low questioning murmur of the one word which embraced the whole story of her sad loss.

They were standing at the corner of the empty byre, in which she had been hunting for eggs when Girzie arrived. Wattie was seated on the low stone dyke admiring his new bonnet, and occasionally holding a conversation with Dawnie. Girzie was beside Jeanie, watching her with a certain grim sympathy expressed on her brown visage.

She had given her the sad tidings in the kindest way she could think of, and that had been abruptly enough. She had no skill in beating about the bush; and she believed that when one had anything to tell which must be told, it was better told at once, whether good or bad. But after she had spoken the worst, she remained silent for a long while, to give Jeanie time to recover from the first shock.

“Ye’ll just hae to bear ’t, Jeanie, like ither folk,” she said at last, bluntly; tying an extra knot on the kerchief she wore across her shoulders. “It’s hard to think o’t at first, I

ken; but it's wonnerfu' how ane's sorrow saftens after a day or twa, when a thing's by help. I mind when Bessie Munro's man gaed doon aff the Plada, Bessie skirlt like a water-kelpie as lang's there was a doubt o' his death; but she got a' richt as sune's she ken'd that it was ayont doubt and nae help for't. She got anither man sax months after, an' a better ane nor the first into the bargain. I dinna ken ony kind o' article that mends sae sune as a broken heart when there's nae other guid it can do. It's surely a mercifu' arrangement for women folk, seeing their hearts are dunted to bits sae mony times in a life."

Jeanie heard the sharp voice ringing in her ears; but of the meaning of the sound she knew nothing. She turned to Girzie with a stupified look.

"But it canna—it canna be true," she said, pitiably. "There was naeboddy saw him gae doun."

"There was naeboddy saw him come up either.

Hoots, lassie, ye maunna mak' mair fash for yoursel' wi' expectin' miracles. I hae had mair sorrow in my day wi' houping for what was clean impossible than I hae ever had frae rale misfortin'. But that's the way o' us puir bodies; we ay keep looking at the cloud owerhead that winna come near us, an' fa' into the sheughs at our feet. I would fain say that it canna be true if it would dae ony guid to tell a lee; but it would be a lee, an' ye'd be sae muckle the waur for't come neist year."

"Drooned!" murmured Jeanie again, putting her hands up to her head bewilderedly; "an' he'll never come back ony mair. O Girzie, it's hard to thole; and me was thinking day and nicht o' him coming hame to save us frae a' our troubles. Had it no' been for that I wouldna hae been able to bear up ava, and noo ——"

She sat down on a big stone, and, covering her face with her hands, sobbed bitterly.

Girzie left her there with the parting

counsel to remember that "there was as guid fish i' the sea as ever came out o't, whatever ane micht think o' their last fishin'."

She went into the house and very briefly informed the old folks of the catastrophe. She did not wait to hear Mrs. Lindsay's usual apostrophe on all calamities, or to answer the numerous questions Adam was eager to ask about the event.

"I hae my day's wark afore me yet, for I haena sauld half my fish this mornin'," she said, turning away; and stopping to look back, she added, "I wouldna say muckle about it to Jeanie. She's taken't sair to heart."

And then the woman with her sharp voice, shrewd face, cynical manner, and kindly heart all strangely mingled, strode away to the work which had been interrupted to serve Robin Gray and his friends.

Wattie was looking frequently back to the cot and halting as if half intending to return.

"What are ye glowering at, laddie?" said

his mother, looking back to him as he made a longer pause than usual at a curve of the road.

Wattie ran after his mother, and when he reached her side looked over his shoulder again in the direction of the cot.

“What for was Jeanie greeting, mither?” he asked.

“Because Jeamie Falcon’s drooned.”

She always answered him seriously, however trivial the question might be.

“Drooned? Whaur?”

“At the bottom o’ the sea—he’s dead—we’ll never see him again.”

Wattie was thoughtful for a long while, and then—

“Will he ay bide amang the fishes? What a drookit creature he’ll be!” and he laughed, whilst his mother regarded him wistfully.

Jeanie’s sorrow was very quiet. Save that her face was a little more haggard than it had been previously, and that she would pause

occasionally in her work with a dim vacant stare on her face, there was no outward sign of her heart's woe.

But the world was dark and weary to her now, for she saw no hopeful future. Whilst Jeamie lived there had always been a bourne to look to, that inspired courage to meet the present difficulty. Now there was just the daily fight, without other promise of rest than that of the grave. The bitterest pang of such a loss springs from the utter exclusion of the loved one from our vision of the future.

Robin Gray did not present himself at the cottage for more than a week. He knew that Jeanie would suffer cruelly, and he did not care to see her until the worst of it was over. He made inquiries, meanwhile, and satisfied himself that the *Colin* and Falcon had been lost in the manner described to him by the Laird. But of the cause of the fire he was not satisfied.

The insurance agent had shown him the various statements of the men who had escaped. Carrach's statement contained the only suggestion of the cause of the fire; that one of the crew had been down in the hold and had permitted a spark to escape from his lantern without knowing it. The only man he knew who had been in the hold that evening was James Falcon; and probably Falcon's reason for lingering so long on the brig that he had been unable to escape was owing to the fear of the consequences of his negligence or oversight.

The agent received the statements from the men themselves, with the exception of the mate's, which had been brought to him by the skipper in writing, as Hutcheson had taken a ship at Cork and sailed for China without coming home.

Robin determined to see Hutcheson privately if he ever came back to Portlappoch. But of this he said nothing.

Although he spoke to Adam and the guidwife about the *Colin*, and honestly lamented the sad fate of such a promising young fellow as James Falcon, no reference to either passed between Jeanie and him. He observed her sorrow, and respected it with the silence she seemed to desire.

Eager as he was to tell her of the hope which this calamity had permitted to spring again in his breast, he did not hastily intrude it upon her. He was waiting for time to soften her grief before he ventured to speak; and with as much cunning as a man of his years and inexperience in wooer's craft, or indeed craft of any kind, could command, he concealed the lover under the character of the sympathizing friend.

Perhaps it should be said rather that he *tried* to conceal the real nature of his regard for her, and believed he succeeded. But anybody with eyes open could easily fathom the brawny farmer's motives. Kindly and open-

handed as he was with all who were in difficulties, his interest in Adam Lindsay and his family was clearly of more than ordinary depth.

The summer, however, had passed, and harvest was nearly through, and he had not spoken yet. The words had been more than once at the tip of his tongue, and he had hastily swallowed them again, as some pensive glance of Jeanie's eye reminded him that she was still thinking of Jeamie.

"She would sune get ower that if we were ance married," he would say to himself as he turned away; "confound it, I wish the puir lad hadna been drooned, or I hadna cared sae muckle for her."

At last the opportunity he had so longed for presented itself to him—under somewhat gloomy auspices certainly.

The market-day before harvest finished at Cairnieford, Adam, who although still unable to use his arm, could manage to walk as far

as the town with the help of a stout stick, returned from the Port to find Jeanie in a high state of alarm about her mother. Mrs. Lindsay had had an unusually "bad turn."

The doctor came, and directed that the patient should be carefully nursed and served with nourishing and delicate food, mentioning a variety of dainties, which were as far beyond Jeanie's power to procure as the precious fruit of Alladin's cave.

What was her surprise a couple of hours afterward to receive a basket from the town, brought by the doctor's boy, containing almost everything that had been ordered for her mother. She knew who had been the sender, although the laddie said he had got the things from his master. She knew quite well that the doctor had met Robin Gray in the market; told him about her mother, and he had forwarded the necessary articles he knew she could not obtain otherwise.

He came himself in the afternoon, and on the threshold she arrested him with thanks.

“Ye’re placing us under new obligations every day,” she said in the quiet sad way she had obtained lately; “an’ I dinna think we’ll ever be able to pay ye back. Whiles I think that ye maun fancy ye get little even o’ thanks for a’ ye ha’e dune. But oh, dinna think that, for it’s because the heart is fu’ that words are scarce.”

Like most generous men, he felt awkward in acknowledging gratitude; so he moved his huge feet uneasily, and answered:—

“I ken a’ that, Jeanie—but how is she now?”

“Better, an’ she’s fallen into a sleep.”

“That’s weel, and—and—Jeanie—”

He suddenly griped her arm—still a shapely one, although it had lost much of its plumpness.

There was a pause, and her sad eyes

scanned his face with a fear in them of what was coming.

"There's something I hae wanted to say to ye for a lang while, Jeanie," he said hurriedly, and gazing fixedly at her hand; "but for the reason that I didna want to fash ye, I hae held back. Ye may as weel ken now as ony ither time."

"Aye, Mister Gray," she said huskily turning her face from him.

"I want ye to marry me, Jeanie," he said simply, and with emotion; "that's the plain truth, and that's the way ye can relieve yoursel' o' a' the weight o' debt ye fancy ye're owing me and worrying yoursel' about. I'm an auld man maybe for siccan a young lass, but ye ken me, and ye winna find ony difference in me as lang's I live. I'll try to make ye happy, lass, and your faither and mither comfortable. That's a' I hae to say."

She took his big strong hand in hers, and pressed it warmly.

“Ye hae been a guid frien’ to us at our sairest need,” she answered chokingly; “an’ if ye had asked me to lay doon my life for ye, I would hae dune’t willingly. But, oh, I canna—canna be your wife, when I’m ay thinking about him that’s awa.”

“That wound ’ll heal, Jeanie, in time. Ye canna be his now, or I would na hae spoken. But ye can if ye will make three folk happy. For their sakes, Jeanie, dinna refuse me.”

He spoke with a simple earnestness that moved her deeply, knowing as she did the truth and goodness of his nature. There was nothing of a girl’s bashfulness in her manner. His grave earnest speech had its effect upon her; and, besides, she had been prepared for something of this sort long ago.

“I ken that he’s awa; but, oh, my thochts are wi’ him yet, an’ I couldna be a true wife ay thinking about him. But there’s nae-thing in the warld for me to do noo but help my faither an’ puir mither.”

“Ye’ll do that best as mistress o’ Cairnieford; and your memory o’ James Falcon winna mak ye a haet the waur a wife.”

“Gi’e me a wee while to think—until the morn—I canna, canna answer ye the noo.”

“I dinna want to press ye ower sair or ower sune,” he said, detaining her, and now his clear eyes rested on her averted face yearningly—eyes glistening with a passion in which his whole strength seemed concentrated. “Maybe I shouldna hae spoken yet; but, wow, lass, it’s been hard wark to keep the upper hand o’ the thoughts and feelings that hae been jum’lin’ through me sae lang. I hae tried wi’ a’ my micht to keep doon the words that I hae been burnin’ to speak, lest they should pain you, and mak’ a gowk o’ mysel’. But I canna bear’t ony langer. Jeanie, Jeanie, lass, ye hae been like the licht o’ heaven itsel’ to me—Guid forgi’e me if ’t be wrang to feel sae. I just couldna help mysel’. A’ the gowd I hae won and saved,

a' my beasts and plenishing that I hae been toiling for, for mair nor thretty year, hae grown as nocht in my e'e, compared wi' you. I would heave them a' frae me this minute, wi' a glad heart, if that would bring ye ony nearer to me."

"Oh dinna say ony mair," she cried, striving to escape from him. The passion of the man made her tremble; for she felt that she had nothing wherewith to requite it.

"I maun speak on noo, if it was to be the last time I was ever to speak again wi' you. I ken it's redic'lous like for an auld man like me (bitterly) to be speaking this way. But I canna help mysel'. A deevil or an angel has got possession o' me, and's drivin' me on whether I will or no. God help me, I feel mair like a wean ready to greet I dinna ken what for, nor a man that might be your father. I ken hoo redic'lous it is; I ken hoo folk would lauch at me did they ken o't; but a' that just makes it the waur to bear.

Dinna ye lauch at me, lass, for that would drive me mad at ance."

"Oh Heaven kens hoo I wish that I could gie ye sic a heart as ye deserve," she exclaimed impetuously; and was sorry the next moment that she had said so much, feeling the tremulous eagerness with which he drew her shrinking form toward him, and fearing, with good reason, that he had accepted the wish as equivalent to the power to realize it.

"They were sweet words, hinny, sweet words to ane that never ken'd father, mither, or sister, and wha began life haudin' horses in the market and herdin' cattle—wha's had a sair faucht wi' the warld, though he has got the better o't, and never ken'd what it was to hae onybody to lo'e him for his ain sake. Ye needna draw frae me, Jeanie. Powerfu' though this passion be, it hasna the power to make me forget that I'm Robin Gray, twa score and ten, and ye're a young

lassie, whase kind heart pities me, and can do nae mair.

“I would do onything—onything in the warld but this, to pleasure ye.” (Gasping and confused.)

“And this is the only thing in the world that can pleasure me (calming); and gin ye’ll come to my hame, and bring the sunsheen into’t, ye’ll never hae cause to sorrow, if it be in the power o’ man to mak’ ye happy.”

“I hae no doubt o’ that” (sincerely).

“The morn, then, ye’ll tell me whether or no ye’ll be the guidwife o’ Cairnieford.”

“Aye, the morn.”

“And ye’s hae my guidwill to’t,” said Adam, who had come out seeking Jeanie in time to hear the last words.

“Thank ye, Adam, but it’s the lassie’s I want first.”

“Ye’s hae that, Cairnieford, ye’s hae that.”

“We’ll ken the morn.”

And Jeanie, having retreated the moment her father had appeared, Robin hurried off; unwilling to remain, lest he should in any way take advantage of the influence he was aware that Adam was ready to use on his behalf.

But although he was too generous to avail himself of that influence, he was mistaken in fancying that it would not be used unasked.

CHAPTER X.

A HEART STRUGGLE.

“My father argued sair, my mither didna speak,
But she looked in my face till my heart was like to break.”
—*The Ballad.*

Adam Lindsay was a stern man, and apt to grumble petulantly at the sharp stones and thorns he had to tramp over on his road of life. But he was not intentionally unkind in act or word. Simply, his conduct was regulated by a narrow view of morals.

To him the chief end of man was to attend the kirk regularly, to “pay his way,” and to save as much siller as possible. That was the sum total of his creed; and he was sincerely consistent in walking by its light. If the light happened to make him uncharitable in judging his neighbours, he was unconscious

of the failing. Well-doing was to him synonymous with making siller. Justice meant paying everybody whatever number of pounds, shillings, and pence might be owing. Yet when he heard the minister preach against the worship of Mammon, Adam had no suspicion that he was in any way guilty of that sin. Sentiment entered very slightly into his nature; and his affection for his daughter displayed itself in pride of her deft and thrifty ways. When James Falcon asked her to be his wife, Adam was proud that a daughter of his should marry one who was regarded by most folk as in a measure the adopted son and probable heir of the Laird of Clashgirn.

When he learned that Falcon was obliged to sail in the *Colin* and put off the marriage because he had no money, and was unable to obtain the farm from the Laird without it, he was disappointed. But he thought it would come right after a while.

The news came that Falcon was lost, and Adam said, "Puir lad, on his first voyage too! Aweel, we maun a' die ae time or ither."

Now, Robin Gray had asked Jeanie to marry him, and Adam, proud as he had been at the idea of her becoming the wife of Falcon, whose fortune was at the best only in prospect, was still prouder to think that she should become at once mistress of such a bein house as that of Cairnieford. So, in the evening, when Mrs. Lindsay was lying quiet and much relieved by the administration of the mixture the doctor had supplied, and a glass of the wine Robin Gray had supplied, Adam spoke.

It had been working in him all afternoon, and especially for the last hour, during which he had been seated by the fire on the straight-backed chair. The Bible lay on his knee and his hand rested on the open page, his finger pointing to the verse at which he had stopped reading.

Jeanie was sitting on a stool opposite knitting a long blue “ribbed” stocking, her head bowed, and her fingers moving rapidly. In that position she had remained for the last half hour and no word passed between them. But indeed they never entered into what might be called conversation. Jeanie was still but a bairn in her father’s eyes, and in her’s he was the parent to be answered and obeyed when he chose to speak, but not addressed as she might have done an ordinary friend.

It never occurred to him that she was a woman, and might be able to converse with him about the general affairs of their small world as a neighbour would have done. Consequently they would sit for night after night without a word passing between them, except in the form of a question as to whether or not something had been done, or a direction to do something.

“Hae ye thocht o’ what Cairnieford was

saying, Jeanie?" said Adam, abruptly turning his eyes from the fire to her.

Jeanie started as if a pistol had exploded at her ear; one of her knitting needles slipped a dozen loops, and in hastily trying to repair the damage her worsted became ravelled. Her hands trembled slightly as she tried to unravel it, but it seemed almost as if she were making it worse rather than better. Something was choking her and she could not speak. She knew that the crisis had come which she could no longer put off.

Adam had never before waited so long for an answer from his daughter, and he repeated his question peremptorily.

"What's wrang wi' the lass?" he exclaimed impatiently, not having received an immediate response. "Did ye no hear what I was saying?"

"Aye, faither, I heard ye," she said agitatedly, the ravelment of the worsted becoming still more confusing.

“What way do ye no speak then, and no sit there like a dummy that couldna answer a sensible question?”

“I was gaun to speak, faither, if ye would but gie me time. I hae been thinking o’t an’—an’——”

“Weel, what are ye hirplin’ at noo?” and his finger slipped impatiently from the verse at which it had been pointed.

“I dinna think that I ought to agree—I dinna think that I can agree.”

She became somewhat calmer as soon as she had pronounced this decision, which she knew quite well was in direct opposition to her parent’s wishes. But she did not raise her eyes from her work, to which she applied herself with renewed energy.

Adam opened his eyes wide, fairly lost his place in the book altogether, and gave his maimed arm a jerk which resulted in a twinge of pain that brought forth a short groan, and did not increase his patience.

“Dinna think ye ought to—dinna think ye can agree!” he ejaculated, as soon as he could find breath for his indignation; “an’ what for no, I would like to ken? Is he no a weel-doing man, an’ a kind-hearted man wi’ a bein house an’ a’ that ony sensible woman would desire—aye, an’ let me tell ye that ony woman in the town would loup at his offer and be proud o’t.”

“He’s a’ that ye say and mair, but—oh, father, I canna marry him—or ony body.”

“An’ what for no, I say again, I would like to ken?”

He emphasized his demand by closing the Bible on his knee with a slap.

Mrs. Lindsay turned her head feebly on the pillow and looked beseechingly at her daughter.

“For the reason I hae gi’en himsel’,” she said in a low sad voice that was broken by suppressed sobs; “because I’m no fit to be his

wife wi' a' my heart lying out yonder wi' Jeamie i' the sea."

"Whatna havers is that ye're saying? Ye canna marry a drooned man, can ye? an' I ettle ye's no get siccan anither offer as Cairnieford's this towmond or mair."

"I dinna want ony offer, faither, an' it's no for his bein house that I would tak' Robin Gray or onybody. I respec' him ower muckle for that, and if he was as puir as Jeamie was I would rather hae him nor ony ither man I ken; but I dinna want to marry."

She had unravelled the worsted, and recommenced knitting now with a dark shadow on her bonnie face, and tears glistening in her eyes.

Adam sat bolt upright in his chair, glowering at her. It was the first time his daughter had been openly disobedient, and the effect was a shock as great as if she had perpetrated a crime of the deepest dye.

"Ye would drive a saunt oot o's wits wi'

anger. A braw thing for a man come to my years, that's wrought hard a' my days to gie ye a decent upbringin', to find that my ain dochter winna do my biddin', when she kens it's a' for her ain guid."

"I never refused to do your biddin' afore, faither, and I wouldna do't noo, but I canna help mysel'. Ye dinna ken what a sair fecht I hae had to bring mysel' to say no, when in mony ways it would be sae muckle to my advantage to say aye."

"Ye had nae business to hae siccan a fecht. What in Guid's name should ye fecht about? Was ye quarrelin' wi' yoursel' because ye was offered a guid hame an' a kind-hearted man?"

"No——" she was going to say that it was because she had no love to give him; but she felt that such an answer would only have irritated her father the more.

"Then what was't? Was't because ye jist wanted to anger me? Let me tell ye there

never was ane that quarrelled wi' het parritch that didna wish for cauld afore's death. Ye's be nae dochter o' mine gin ye dinna tell Cairnieford the morn that ye'll tak' him an' thankfu'."

Jeanie felt her cheek burning, and she was disposed to give a still more decisive answer than she had yet done; when raising her eyes she saw the white imploring face of her mother, and her heart faltered.

"It's the maist extr'ordinar' nonsense I ever heard tell o'," Adam went on angrily, "to think that ye'll set your face against me and your mither an' a man like Cairnieford, an' a' for nae ither reason nor that the man ye wanted's drooned. Gin he'd been livin' ye couldna mak' mair ado. I lay my command upo' ye to answer Cairnieford as he deserves to be, an' if ye winna, ye'll be the sufferer yoursel'. As for me and your mither, we're no lang for this world noo, but I didna expec' that our last days were to be made miserable

by the disobedience o' our ae bairn. I thoct we were ill eneuch without that."

To do Adam justice, all his eagerness for this marriage was not in any way influenced by the idea that it would benefit himself; it was wholly on his daughter's account that he desired it—that he might have the pride of seeing her well settled before his time came for flitting to the kirkyard. Whilst he had been speaking last some glimmering of what the future might be to Jeanie if she refused this offer of a comfortable home dawned upon him; and, added to the real pain he experienced from her disobedience, overcame his wrath sufficiently to make his voice husky as he finished. Jeanie had no answer to make, and he did not speak. He read a chapter from the Bible, and went to bed in an ill-humour.

When Robin Gray came next day with a wistful uneasiness expressed on his genial face, he found Adam at the door.

“The auld wife’s a wheen better,” he said, moving uncomfortably on his chair. “Jeanie’s in the kitchen. Gang but.”

He had not said a word to her about the conversation of the previous night. He was too stern and proud for that; but he was not quite satisfied that the issue would be as he desired. So whilst the warm sunlight was glaring around him there was a dark sorrow on the old man’s brow.

Jeanie was in the kitchen washing the dishes when Robin entered. She was paler, he thought, than he had ever seen her before. Her voice seemed lower and sadder as she bade him “guid mornin’, sir.”

Robin’s heart swelled, for that did not sound like a very promising address to an anxious lover, and Robin at two score and ten was as anxious a wooer as ever was youth of twenty. He had not known what it was to lie awake even half an hour after going to bed for many years until last night; when he

had lain uncomfortably awake till early morning. It was no marvel, then, that he observed the slightest alteration of look or tone.

He made no comment, however, and after simply expressing his pleasure in learning that the guidwife was better like, he stood hesitatingly twining and untwining the lash of his heavy riding whip round his fingers. She went on wiping the dishes, and both were conscious of an awkward pause.

“I ken ye’re waiting for me to tell ye what I hae determined on,” she said presently, and with some nervousness.

“There’s nae use concealing’t, Jeanie, I hae puir patience when I’m set on onything, till I ken the best or worst o’t; and the hope and the fear o’ your answer hae been keeping up sic a wranglin’ in my head that they hae driven a’ thought o’ ither things oot o’t.”

“I’ll no keep ye waiting lang noo; but I’m jist like ane that’s feart for the sea, an’ wha’s

got ae foot in a boat an' the ither oot, and is no sure whether to gang forrit or back."

"Then ye haena decided yet." (A little dissatisfied.)

"Aye, I hae made up my mind—to tell ye a' the truth an' let ye decide for yoursel'."

"The truth—what about?" (A little surprised.)

"About mysel'." (Wiping a plate slowly.)
"Ye ken a' about Jeamie, and ye hae said that it winna matter. That's anither reason for the honour and respec' I bear ye, and I couldna do itherways, seeing a' that ye hae dune for me and mine. But I canna care for ye as I cared for him, and gin I was my lane in the world I would say *no* to your offer, jist because I honour ye, and think ye should hae a wife deservin' o' ye—"

"But what better would I be if I didna care for her?" he interrupted eagerly.

"I canna answer that," she said, smiling in

spite of her sorrow; and that Robin accepted as a good omen. "But I was gaun to say that I'm no my lane, and for the sake o' them that need my help, for the sake o' a that we are awing ye—gin ye can take me understan'in' a' that, I'm ready to be your wife, Robin Gray, and I'll try to be a faithfu' ane."

"It's a bargain," he cried, loud with joy, and catching her in his arms, in spite of the plate, which was smashed on the floor, he kissed her with a smack which certainly sounded of delight. "It's a bargain—and that's the erls," he added.

There never was lover so enthusiastic, and there never was lady so cold. She seemed to become aware that she was playing an ungracious part, for she tried to smile and said softly—

"Ye winna heed me being a wee thing quiet, for it's mair i' my heart to greet nor to laugh."

"I'll no heed onything ye like to do, my dawtie, sae lang's ye dinna change your mind afore the minister puts it ayont your power to do't. Bless ye, lassie, ye hae gien me a happiness that I never ken'd afore. I'll crawl as crouse as a gamecock noo, an' I'm half minded to gie ye twa or three steps o' the Hielan' fling this minute, jist to relieve mysel' o' some o' this joy that's swellin' my breast."

"I wish ye may never hae cause to repent o' your joy."

"Repent! Hoots, lassie, haud up your head an' look in my face. See if it's ane that's ever like to change. Nae fear o' that; its new life ye hae gien me, an' I'm as young again's I was three minutes syne. Nae doubt we'll hae bits o' bickerings, as a' folk hae; but we'll hael them wi' a kiss, an' gang doucely to kirk an' fair thegither for a' that."

Jeanie could not help experiencing a sense of relief. As the sunshine lightens the heart

so the warm light of this man's great love shone in upon her despondency, lifted it up, and blessed her with the first breath of sweet content she had known for many days.

There is an irresistible gladness rewards the bestower of pleasure on others—like mercy, the gift blesses the giver and receiver; and Jeanie was in no way unfaithful to the memory of James Falcon in feeling the happier for Robin Gray's joy. Besides, it is only the sourest of natures which can persist in remaining gloomy and sad when the radiance of a pleasant future is shed upon them. She had been fretted by the thousand petty cares of a struggle for mere existence, with a dark hopeless future. That was all over now; there were light and peace before her; and as the weight of her burden decreased, she could not but be relieved.

"I'll ay be glad when I see ye happy, Robin," she said as he was leaving, after

having insisted upon an early marriage, and obtained her consent.

“Then ye’ll ay be glad, Jeanie lass, for I’ll ay be happy.”

He spoke quite confidently—no shadow of fear crossing his mind.

CHAPTER XI.

A WEDDING AND A HOME-COMING.

“Fy let us a’ to the bridal,
For there’ll be liltin’ there;
For Jock’s to be married to Maggie,
The lass wi’ the gowden hair.”—*Old Song.*

There was no happier man in all Scotland than Robin Gray on that bright Sabbath morning when the banns of marriage were proclaimed between the bachelor of Cairnieford and the spinster of Portlappoch. He had oiled his hair and brushed his whiskers with unusual care, and dressed himself with all the labour of a youthful beau to attend the kirk that morning.

He sat proudly erect on his seat in the far corner of the kirk when the proclamation was made, and he never blinked under the

curious stare of the congregation which was immediately turned upon him, as if he were about to perpetrate some deed which demanded the active interest of all who knew anything about him. Even those who only knew him by name took a good look at him, as if he had suddenly done something which rendered him worthy of special observation.

Douce old couples, who had known the ups and downs of married life, regarded him with grave benignancy; young couples, who had just passed the Rubicon, smiled to each other, as if it were a satisfaction to discover others embarking on the same sea as themselves. Maidens looked and wondered when their turn would come; not a few would have been well pleased to change places with the spinster who had just been proclaimed, and, having no chance of doing so, thought that she had "waled a man wi' years eneuch ony-way." Those who knew about James Falcon gave their watering mouths a wry twist, and

thought that she had “on wi’ the new love gey sune after being aff wi’ the auld.”

Youths who knew Jeanie, on the other hand, would not have been sorry to change places with the proud bachelor, and wondered that she would take such an old man. Then they thought sneeringly of well-stocked Cairnieford, and for five seconds held woman-kind in general in bitter scorn for their mercenary affections.

The stare presently turned from the bachelor to Adam Lindsay’s seat. But Adam was there alone, dry, clean, and stiff, the splints and bandages of his wounded arm hidden by a big red cotton handkerchief, the corners of which were fastened behind his neck, and the body of it forming a comfortable rest for the arm. There was satisfaction and pride in the father’s heart at that moment, such as he had never known since the day on which his own banns had been proclaimed. There was his daughter publicly

announced as the future guidwife of Cairnieford. He felt as much honoured as if he had publicly received some acknowledgment of personal merit.

As for Robin, he was proud too, as well as happy. He gazed straight at the pulpit during the examination of the folk; but his eyes wavered a moment to rest on the hawkish face of the Laird of Clashgirn, whose seat was just beneath the pulpit—that he might be the nearer to godliness probably. The Laird's eyes twinkled, and there was a queer grin on his visage as his head made one of its peculiar dabs forward at his Bible. It was a complacent and patronizing grin, and yet Robin read it as meaning, "I hae got ye noo, my frien'."

The sunlight streamed in through the windows with their white blinds at either side of the pulpit, and shed a glancing radiance around the ruddy-visaged and snowy-haired minister as he gave out the psalm.

The congregation rose and the simple song of praise was chanted, not in the best of tune, perhaps, for the precentor's voice was cracked and his tone somewhat shrill, and few of the folk practised music or attempted to sing a note except in the kirk, but with a sincerity in singing right or wrong that imparted a certain harmony to the discord.

With all its discord of untrained voices, the song had never before sounded so solemnly in the ears of Robin Gray, for his heart was glad and lifted up in thankfulness.

When the service was over, and the congregation was slowly, and in order, quitting the kirk, groups of twos and threes halted among the graves outside, and about the gate of the kirkyard, to exchange friendly greetings, and gossip a little about the weather, the crops, the sermon, and the general news of the week—for newspapers were rare in those days, and the news of a month past progressed slowly to the folk of Portlappoch,

and was passed graciously from mouth to mouth as *news*.

The forthcoming marriage was another topic of this day's gossip, and as Robin halted to speak to his acquaintances, he received congratulations and pawky smiles, which he accepted with good-humoured thanks.

The Laird of Clashgirn, leaning on his thick gold-headed Sabbath staff—for he used a plainer one on week-days—hirpled up to him.

"I gie ye joy, Cairnieford," he said with a complacent dab, "and a lang life wi' your dawtie. Od, it's extraordinar.' Ye beat us a' wi' your farm an' your cattle, and noo ye beat us a' wi' marryin' the brawest lass amang us."

"I'm obleeged to ye, McWhapple," answered Robin drily and moving off.

The Laird hirpled after him with malicious friendliness.

"Aye, she's a braw quean" (smirking and taking a pinch); "but it couldna be true that

she cared muckle for my puir frien' Jeames Falcon, or she couldna hae forgot him so soon."

Robin halted, and his visage darkened for an instant. Somehow, this reference to Falcon seemed to convey a slur upon Jeanie and himself, and a twinge of anger shot through him that imparted a bitterness to the cup of joy he had been quaffing. But the shadow passed; the sun shone too brightly on this day to permit it to linger.

"That's atween hersel' and him that's awa, McWhapple," he answered quietly; "but she kens that if she was to greet her e'en oot, or to bide single a' her days, she couldna bring the dead to life."

"And so she mends her loss wi' takin' anither man. Od, that's woman-like."

"Just that. By-the-by, did ye hear what Dunbar was telling me? There's been a heap o' smugglin' hereabout, especially in brandy an' tobacco."

“That smugglin’s an awfu’ ruination to honest traders.”

“Nae doot. Ye do a wee in the brandy and tobacco trade yoursel’, d’ye no?”

“Whiles — whiles” (grasping his staff tightly).

“Aye, weel, ye’ll be glad to hear that the gaugers hae gotten word o’ the smugglin’, and they’re determined to put it down.”

“A guid thing—a guid thing for honest trade. Guid day to ye, Cairnieford.”

And the Laird hirpled away to the inn for his pony.

Robin’s good-humour was completely restored now; for he was always amused whenever he had said anything to make the Laird uncomfortable, and evidently Clashgirn had been none the blither for the information he had received, in spite of his admiration for honest trade.

The banns having been proclaimed three times on the one Sabbath, the marriage took

place on the Wednesday following. It was a simple affair, so far as the ceremony was concerned.

The kitchen of Adam Lindsay's cottage, with its plain earthen floor and brightly polished tins on the yellow-ochred walls, was the scene of the bridal.

Mrs. Lindsay was so much better that she was able to sit in the big chair by the fireplace, supported by pillows and blankets. The guests consisted of two friends, their wives, and the daughter of one of the couples, Bessie Tait, who had been Jeanie's companion, and Jock Dunbar, the son of Robin Gray's neighbouring farmer. Bessie and Jock officiated as bridesmaid and best-man.

Mr. Monduff, the ruddy-visaged kindly-hearted minister, arrived, congratulated the guidwife upon being out of bed and on the event of the day, told Bessie it would be her turn next, and bade Jock Dunbar make haste and give him more work to do. Bessie crim-

soned and tossed her head, and Jock grinned and looked sheepish.

The simple jokes of the kindly minister put all the folk in good humour; and presently Jeanie appeared, flushed with the hurry of dressing, for she had been engaged up till the last minute cooking the dinner, which Mrs. Tait was to dish up after she had gone. The flush improved her amazingly, and relieved her cheeks of the sad pallor which would have been so little in keeping with the face of a bride.

Robin was excited and nervous, eager to get the ceremony over. But Jeanie was gravely quiet, and placed her hand in his trustingly when the proper moment arrived. He grasped it fervently and looked at her with a proud smile, as much as to say, "You are mine now, come what may."

Mr. Monduff's homily on the responsibilities of husbands and wives was brief, and as soon as it was finished the marriage

“lines” were signed, and Robin signified his triumph and satisfaction by giving his wife a hearty kiss in the presence of the delighted company. All present congratulated the pair, and Jeanie looked somewhat dazed as one after another saluted her as Mistress Gray.

A gig, hired from the inn for the occasion, was waiting outside. The bride’s box—a small thing containing all her “providing,” which had been necessarily of a very limited nature—was placed under the seat. She took leave of father and mother.

“I wish ye weel, Mistress Gray,” said Adam, stiff and proud; “and may ye live lang enuch to unnerstan’ what a proud day this is for me.”

“The Lord keep ye, my bairn,” said the meek mother tearfully, “and make this the beginnin’ o’ mony days o’ joy.”

“I’ll warrant that, mither,” cried Robin heartily.

He helped his wife into the gig, and a shower of old bauchels were thrown at them as he drove away, looking back, flourishing his whip, and returning the shout of good speed with cheery voice. He made the horse gallop furiously, to keep pace with the joyful dancing of his heart.

“There’s nae use tryin’ to tell ye what I feel, guidwife,” he cried, suddenly throwing his arm around her, while whip and reins were shifted to one hand; “I canna do’t. But it’s jist—it’s jist heeven. My certes, I’d hae been married lang syne if I’d kent there’d been sae muckle delight in’t.”

And crack went the whip again, and away went the horse with a fresh bound and renewed vigour, whilst the setting sun was glinting upon them through the trees, and the birds were loudly singing their evening song. The keen wind, the sunlight, the chorus of birds, the rich green foliage of the trees, and the yellow ripening stooks in the

fields—all seemed to sympathize with the bridegroom's gladness. Even Jeanie felt exhilarated by the rapid motion of the vehicle and the blythesomeness of all that surrounded her.

If the marriage at the cottage had been quiet, Robin had determined that the "hame-coming" should make up for it in loud mirth.

So, as they drove up the glen in which the white house of Cairnieford nestled cosily amongst firs and beeches, with the last red rays of the setting sun glancing over the roof, there was a crowd gathered at the corner of the by-road leading from the main road to the steading.

Farmers and their wives, with grown-up sons and daughters, and all the servants of Cairnieford, buxom dairymaids and sturdy ploughmen, were waiting to welcome the happy couple. The moment the gig turned the head of the road, near the mouth of the glen, and became visible to the waiting crowd,

a welcoming shout echoed along the hills. It was repeated when the gig stopped in their midst, and hearty congratulations were accompanied by warm grasps of the hand, which indicated the sincerity of the speakers.

John Dunbar, the farmer of Boghaugh, being the oldest man of the company, gave the bride a paternal kiss, bidding her welcome hame, and adding that “ye nicht hae cast your gartens a hantle waur, guidwife.”

Robin in his boisterous happiness repeated the salutation as they entered the house, after the batchelors present, young and old, had competed in a race from the corner of the road to the house for the bride’s gartens. The trophy was won by a strapping young ploughman, whose length of limb obtained for him the cognomen of Lang Rob, and whose victory obtained for him the jibes and cheers of his fellow-competitors, and the blushing smiles of the lasses; for Lang Rob had proved in the contest that he was to be the first amongst

them to wed, and his willingness to submit to his fate. Consequently the lads laughed and joked, and the lasses simpered and blushed, wondering which of them might be his future partner.

The barn had been cleared, and a long table, easily constructed by placing a kitchen table at each end and a number of planks supported by tressels between them, had been placed down the centre of the floor. The board was covered with snowy-white cloths, and actually bent under its piles of good homely fare.

Singed sheeps' heads and haggis were the principal dishes, although there was beef and mutton in plenty too. Herrings and whittings, brought that morning fresh from the Port by Girzie Todd, with a huge platter of haddocks, filled up the corners; and what room remained was occupied by kebbocks of cheese and piles of bannocks and scones of barley-meal. These, with a barrel of good

strong ale, a keg of whisky, and sundry bottles of brandy, composed such a feast as made the mouths of the company water for days afterward at the memory of it.

They ate and drank until they could eat and drink no more. Then the table was cleared, and with unceremonious haste everything was carried outside, except a few long forms for the elders to sit on, and one of the tables, which was thrust into a corner to serve as a platform for the musicians.

The musicians consisted of Roving Roney, the piper, and Souter Tam, who played the fiddle, and who, consequently, never touched an awl if he could obtain a drappie by fiddling at any of the social gatherings of the country side.

The orchestra, in a strain of wild discordance, struck up a reel, and away went the dancers, "hooching," laughing, clattering their feet, and flinging their legs about in an alarming fashion, whilst the yells they uttered at

every turn of the reel or the strathspey completely drowned the discord of the music.

The rafters shook again with the sounds of mirth; the candles, stuck on bits of wood against the wall, jumped and spluttered. The old folks, whose dancing days were by, kept time to the clatter of youthful feet by beating their own and their heavy staves on the floor, cracking their thumbs gaily, and joining with their feeble voices in the wild chorus of "hoochs"—a species of happy yell which can only be appreciated when heard, and compared with which the war-whoop of the Indian must be weak.

When the fun was at its loudest, and when the lights had diminished by several candles burning out and others dropping from their niches, leaving shadowy corners where favoured lads might steal a kiss without the old folk being the wiser, the bride contrived to slip unobserved out of the barn and into the house.

The bridegroom, who had proved his youth in spite of his gray hairs by dancing and daffing more furiously than any, soon observed the absence of the one who was to him the queen of all, and immediately endeavoured to follow. But Lang Rob saw him slyly attempting to escape, and raised the halloo.

Robin thereupon threw off all attempt at disguise, and made a bold dash for the door, rushing out with the whole troupe, shouting and laughing, at his heels. But whether Robin's limbs had really grown suppler than usual, or Lang Rob's grown stiffer with the exercise they had undergone, not even he could overtake the flying bridegroom.

The latter darted into the house, slammed to the door, and barred it in the faces of his pursuers, leaving them to spend the rest of the night, and separate as their pleasure might direct.

So the happy day came to an end.

CHAPTER XII.

A CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

“ Shall tempest-riven blossom
When fair leaves fall away,
In coldness close its bosom
'Gainst beams of milder day.”—*Wm. Thom.*

Whatever sad thoughts Jeanie might have been afflicted with on her wedding-day, they had been almost completely ousted by the bustle and excitement attendant on the event. Only once she had been troubled—when standing before the minister listening dreamily to the words which were to change the whole current of her life, and wondering what a simple matter this marriage ceremony proved to be. She had looked forward to it with so much awe; she had thought of it with so much vague dread, as of a rite in which there was some mystic element that would

visibly transform her nature; and here it was passing with the same monotonous calm of the ordinary Sabbath service in the kirk, but without the solemnity the latter obtained from time and place. It had not even the importance which she attached to the minister's gown and broad white bands. He was just dressed in his usual black clothes; and although his tone was earnest, and his expression grave, she could not divest herself of a feeling that the ceremony was not half so solemn as such an important event demanded. There was Bessie Tait, with a sly smirk on her comely face, alternately glancing at the bride, the bridegroom, and Jock Dunbar, to see how they were taking the proceedings. There was Jock with a long face and open mouth, staring hard at the minister as if he expected him to say something terrible; and there was Robin in his new blue coat with the high collar and the bright brass buttons, his features screwed into an expression of

attention, whilst he eagerly watched for the words which would declare the man and woman one. These were trivial thoughts for such a moment: she became suddenly conscious of that, and with the consciousness had come the memory of him by whose side she had expected to stand whenever she had dreamed of her bridal day. Then her heart sunk, leaving her sick and faint.

But Robin Gray's warm grasp had recalled her to the present duty, and the troublous memory had been driven away. It had not been permitted to return with any force during that day. On the following morning when she arose in her new home, the sun was shining, and Robin had so many things to show her, so many new arrangements to plan and to discuss with her—his great love appearing in all, bright as the sunlight—that under such influence it was impossible for her to be sad even had she tried. She had no intention of doing that. She was wholly

untainted by the spirit of discontent which cries all the more for what it cannot have, because it is unreachable. She would rather be happy than otherwise if she could manage it.

She had loved James Falcon truly, loved him with all the strength of her pure simple nature; and had he lived she would have been the wife of no other man. But he was dead; and she had found a good kind husband, who had lifted her and those dear to her above the stings of poverty, the bitterness of which she knew too well, and she could not be otherwise than grateful. She had no highly refined sense of self-sacrifice; but she had a natural sense of duty, and a heart capable of a gratitude that led her as clearly in the right course as if she had received the most delicate education in ethics. Both gratitude and respect she brought to her husband full-handed; and out of these, no doubt, a tenderer sentiment would blossom in time. And indeed after the first few days of coyness, she

could not help becoming a little proud of her home. She who had been accustomed to such pinching and striving was now mistress of plenty; and she was pleased, although her habits of thrift were not in the least danger of changing to those of waste.

So it was natural that by and by she should become somewhat proud of the guid-man who had given her this home. Everybody liked him, everybody admired him—except perhaps the Laird—and the human heart is wonderfully influenced in its likings and dislikings by the opinions of others; however loudly we may assert our independence of judgment. Besides, his fidelity to her was constant and untiring. He observed her with kindling eyes as she moved about with matronly gravity, attending to the affairs of the house, or helping the lassies in the byre to milk a stubborn cow, or feeding the hens, or, in brief, performing any of the duties of a farmer's wife. He followed her steps with

a devotion that seemed to grow day by day into a species of idolatry, that almost frightened her at times with the mere sense of her own unworthiness of it. She could not help being pleased by it for all that, any more than she could help being grateful to him: and day by day as his passion increased, she learned to rest more upon his strength, and to resign herself to him with an utter faithfulness that was closely akin to love, if it were not love itself.

In this way James Falcon became a sad memory which troubled her only at intervals, and that faintly and more faintly, as the fading moon stirs in the depths of a loch. His name had never passed her lips since the marriage day. She avoided so far as might be every thought of him, because she felt that it was right to do so, and because she had an instinctive knowledge that the subject was one her husband disliked. He had given no hint to that effect: he seemed to have

thrust the matter aside with a strong will that it might never interfere with his happiness. But one day he was mimicking the Laird, who had been making another of his shamly sympathetic speeches about a “puir frien’,” and these words seemed to recall something unpleasant. Robin stopped, and in an awkward way begun to speak of other affairs. Jeanie suspected that his abrupt halt had been caused by a reminiscence of Falcon, and she noticed that Robin did not mention the Laird for a good while afterward. That was the nearest approach they made in speech to the subject. If they had bound themselves by solemn vows to avoid it they could not have done so more strictly. Not that they were afraid of it; but he for her sake, and she for his, held it better that the past should lie buried with the dead man out yonder in the sea, than that the faintest hint of it, however pure, should disturb the happiness of the present. Each, with no

more selfish thought than to spare the other pain, wished to forget that Falcon had lived.

Her whole life became concentrated on one object—to make her guidman happy. She was faithful to her promise; and he was faithful to his, for he was “ay happy when he saw her pleased.”

Always seeking means to gratify his wife, Robin had insisted on removing her father and mother to Cairnieford. He had experienced a little difficulty in persuading Adam to consent to this arrangement.

“For thretty years,” said the old fisherman in his stiff proud way, “I hae ay had a roof o’ my ain, puir though it micht be; an’ I canna just stamack the idea o’ bidin’ aneath the roof o’ anither, though it is yours an’ my dochter’s.”

“Aweel, Adam,” rejoined Cairnieford disappointed, but with a twinkle in his eyes as if he felt sure of overcoming the objection;

“if ye winna flit ye’ll hae to fee a lassie to do the work o’ the house, an’ look after my guid-mither. I’m thinking ye’re a wee thing ower stiff in the joints to be reddin’ up the place yersel’, forbye lookin’ after your fishing gear, and takin’ your turn in the boat, as I hope ye’ll sune be able to do.”

“We can get Bess Tait’s lassie to look in whiles an’ see if the auld wife needs onything when I’m awa’.”

“Then ye would rather be behauden to Bess Tait than to Jeanie an’ me?”

“I didna mean that.”

“I’ll no believe but ye do mean it unless ye come up by the morn without mair ado. It’ll pleasure me, and it’ll pleasure my guid-wife, wha’ll be able then, without ony fash, to look after her mither as she’s been used to do. There’s naebody sae willin’ to do it, and there’s naebody sae able, as Jeanie. A’ thing considered, it would be a mortal sin o’ ye to keep the auld wife here.”

The argument thus assumed too grave an aspect to be resisted even by Adam Lindsay's stubbornness. He yielded. So the oars, the boat, and the nets, were removed a couple of miles farther along the shore, and were carried up the stream which coursed through the Glen of Cairnieford. Then the cottage was closed, and the key delivered to the Laird's agent.

That was another link between Jeanie and her husband. Gossips, and the Laird with his hypocritical benigance might pity him, and forebode sorrow as the upshot of such a hasty and unequal match as they were pleased to consider his had been; but all the croaking of all the birds of evil omen in the world would have fallen unheeded on Robin Gray's ears. He did not give a thought to the idle presages which had been whispered about after the Sabbath on which they had been "kirkit"—that is, when for the first time as man and wife they had taken their seats in

the church. They had undergone a severe scrutiny. The colour and trimming of Jeanie's big bonnet, the fold of her Paisley shawl—Robin's gift of course—and its probable cost; her expression and his were all duly registered by the observant matrons and maidens, and formed a staple of interesting converse for the following week. Jeanie had sustained the scrutiny with quiet diffidence; and Robin had looked round with an air of proud satisfaction. After the week of marvel had passed, without any great calamity befalling the house of Cairnieford, the subject begun to lose its interest save to the few confirmed "clashmongers," who, with persistent inquisitiveness, seized every opportunity of learning anything about the doings at the farm.

There was nothing particular, however, to learn, except that Jeanie made a capital farmer's wife, although she had been brought up in a fisherman's cot. She had taken the

dairy entirely in her own hands; and she was reported to have a knack of getting more butter off the kirk than anybody else could do. Her hens laid more eggs and brought forth more chickens than others; the farm-workers sounded her praise all over the country for her sweet sowens, big scones, crumby bannocks, and rich kale. Altogether staid folk begun to think that Cairnieford had made a lucky choice, and had got a "kindly managing body for his guidwife."

The golden autumn slowly faded under the silver snows of winter. The hills and the glen assumed a glistening white mantle; and the crystal burn ran down from the high lands through the heart of the glen, touching the farmstead, and singing in the still air with a sharp merry voice. But whilst the snow fell, and the winds blew shrill and snell up from the sea, there was sweet content under the roof of Cairnieford, and the future cast no shadow on the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM THE SEA.

“ Each whirl of the wheel,
Each step brings me nearer
The hame of my youth—
Every object grows dearer.”—*H. Ainslie.*

Girzie Todd's butt-an'-a-ben formed the corner dwelling of a row of low-thatched houses at the port end of the town. The walls were barely ten feet high, built of unhewn stone, white-washed; the thatch was black with age and smoke, and crowded with sparrows' nests. The windows were more like small square holes than anything else, and what glass remained in the frame-work was blue and knotted. Behind the house she had a patch of ground in which she reared kale and sybows. Leaning against the wall was a little black shed, which had once been used

as a pig-stye, but which was now appropriated to the shelter of Dawnie, the cuddy.

There was a strong odour of fish about the place, which was readily accounted for by observing that at the side of every door of the row hung a fish-haik—a triangular wooden frame, barred like a diminutive gate, and studded with wooden pins, on which hung rows of herring to dry.

Girzie had just returned from her day's journey. It was only about five o'clock, although quite dark; for it was December, and there was a heavy wind lashing the tide against the Port, and moaning wildly over the bar.

She was in the shed "sorting up" her faithful servant for the night, and supplying him with his supper before she touched anything herself.

Wattie was in the house, down on his knees on the earthen floor at the fire-place. His teeth were chattering; and as he swelled

his cheeks and used the whole strength of his lungs to blow the peats into a warm blaze, the fitful gleams of light showed that his nose was blue, his cheeks red, and his hands swollen to a raw-flesh appearance by the bitter cold.

He had no other light except what he could obtain from the fire, as his mother had taken the only lamp they possessed with her to the shed. The floor was worn into little hollows in many places, and especially about the doorway. As Wattie succeeded in fanning the peats into a glow, he heard somebody stumbling over one of these hollows.

He turned, expecting to see his mother, but instead he beheld a man, whom he failed to recognize. With open mouth and eyes, and without stirring from his hands and knees, he stared up at the intruder.

A man much about Wattie's own height, but browner and more muscular. He was dressed like a sailor, in a loose coarse jacket

that added in appearance to his breadth, breeches of dark blue cloth, and a seaman's hat, the broad brim of which shaded his features. He held a heavy black stick in one hand, resting on it slightly. Standing there quite still, with the feeble light on the hearth only serving to cast deeper shadows around him, he certainly did obtain something of an uncanny aspect.

Wattie's teeth begun to chatter again, but with terror this time, and his eyes were fixed upon the man with that species of fascination which fright always inspires. He could not move them even to look for the approach of his mother.

The stranger advanced a step into the light of the fire, and Wattie's pulse stopped.

"Weel, Wattie, what are ye glowering at, man? Do ye no ken me? Whar's your mother?"

Wattie recognized him now, and as the man made another step forward, the natural

with a shriek of terror sprung to his feet, and bounded out at the door. He rushed round to the shed, tumbled over an old trough in his haste, started up again, and dashed into the shed with such blind speed that he banged his mother up against the cuddy. There was scarcely room for her to fall, or she would certainly have been down.

She regained her balance, and before she recovered her breath she administered a smart cuff to the side of his head, as if to repair the injury done to herself, and to recall him to his senses.

“Ye daft idiwut, hae ye gaen clean crack a’thegither?” she cried angrily; “or what’s wrang that ye come dinging folk ower that gate?”

“It’s—it’s him,” blubbered Wattie, rubbing his eyes with his cuffs.

“Wha’s him?”

“Him—cam’ up frae ’mang the fishes—an’

ye said we'd never see him ony mair—an' its jist a ghaist."

Girzie stared in some bewilderment at her son. She understood now that something unusual had happened; but she did not waste time in trying to obtain an explanation from him. She took the classical-shaped crusie in her hand and strode round to the house, Wattie following and holding by her skirt; for much as he feared to face the ghost again, he feared still more to be left behind in the dark. Besides, he felt safe so long as his mother was with him.

"If ye'd jist gie him siccan a dunt as ye gied me enoo," he sobbed in a whisper, "he'd gey sune flee awa'."

Girzie had been shading the light from the wind with her hand. She now raised it above her head as she halted on the threshold of her cot, and gazed fixedly at the man, who was standing quietly on the hearth peering down at the glowing fire. He had

not heard her approach, and did not observe her presence until she spoke.

“Weel, maister—?”

She got no further. He had turned his head, and the light shook violently in her hand as if in danger of dropping to the floor.

“How are ye, Girzie?” he said, moving toward her. She advanced into the chamber, but keeping by the wall as if to avoid him, whilst Wattie clung to her skirt, hiding himself behind it.

“Heaven keep’s and save’s a’,” she gasped; “but is’t your ainsel, Jeames Falcon?”

“Aye, jist my ainsel; wha else would it be?” he answered with the old good-natured smile.

“Then ye’re no drooned?”

“I think no, though I was near enough to’t.”

“Hech, sirs!” she ejaculated with relieved breathing, and setting the crusie down on the

broad window sill; “but ye hae gien me a sair fricht, and Wattie too, puir callan.”

Wattie by this time was peeping over his mother’s shoulder, and hearing Falcon laugh—a degree of humanity which he could not reconcile with a creature who lived under water—he asked timidly—

“An’ ye haena been bidin’ wi’ the fishes a’ this while?”

“No, Wattie, I hae just been bidin’ with other folk like oursel’s.”

“Aye, aye, man, an’ what gar’d them tell the lee about ye, haudin’ Jeanie greetin’ an’ sabbin’ against the wa’?” continued Wattie, regaining courage, and shyly creeping nearer to Falcon with wondering eyes.

“Because they thought it true, no doubt, and maybe wished it so,” answered Falcon, his face brightening at the mention of Jeanie’s name; “and that minds me o’ what I came here to speir, Girzie—”

“Na, lad,” interrupted Girzie hastily; “ye’s

speir nae questions till ye hae had a bite o' something to drive the cauld out—it's ill speaking on a toom wame. Rin awa' an' bring in the herrin', Wattie. Sit ye doon there, Jeames Falcon, and tell us a' about hoo ye ever won hame again."

With all her shrewd sharp ways Girzie was kindly at heart; and after the first shock of surprise she had divined at once that Falcon had come to ask about Jeanie. She had observed how his visage—browner and manlier than it had been a year ago—had brightened at the sound of her name, and she was a little puzzled to know how she was to acquaint him with the altered condition of affairs.

Falcon, although palpably impatient of all delay, knew the stubborn character of the old fishwife too well to attempt to obtain any information from her until she was ready to communicate it. So, with the best grace he could command, he seated himself on the

stool to which she had pointed, whilst she busied herself cooking the herring on the peats and laying the table. The latter was a simple operation, and consisted merely of drawing the small deal table from its corner and placing three plates and half a dozen bannocks on it.

The conversation did not halt, however, whilst she thus busied herself; for however unwilling she might be to give news before he had partaken of her hospitality, she was not in the least averse to receive his. She was thinking about Cairnieford all the time he was speaking, and of those who were resting there in peaceful ignorance of the thunderbolt which was about to drop in their midst.

"I cam' round by Adam Lindsay's," he said, as he seated himself; "but the house is shut up."

"Aye—whan did you come back?" (drily and busily).

“I landed at Ayr the day, and walked over. I haena been in Portlappoch an hour yet.”

“Then ye haena heard oucht o’ your frien’s?”

“No a word, an’ that’s what brought me here.”

“Just that—but ye haena said a word about hoo ye came to be in life ava. Carrach and the lave o’ them cam’ hame—barrin’ Hutcheson—and they a’ said ye was drooned.”

“Aye, tell us hoo ye wasna drooned,” said Wattie, “courieing” down before him, and drawing his knees up to his chin by clasping his hands round his ankles.

“Then they all got safe home?”

“Oo aye, safe an’ weel eneuch.”

“I’m glad of it, although it’s more than some of them deserved,” said Falcon quietly; “it was by no good-will of theirs that I managed to escape.”

“Hoo was that, say ye?”

“The lads had taken an ill-will to me, but I know now that they were designedly set against me. However, they took it in their heads that it was me set fire to the brig, and they were for leaving me on deck while they got off in the sma’ boat if it hadna been for Hutcheson. Carrach asked me to get a compass and the log out of his cabin. He said that there was no chance for them without the compass. That was a lie, for we were within two miles of land, and he knew it.”

“Aye, he’s a queer cratur,” observed Girzie under her breath, and with a tone of bitterness.

“I got the compass, but found that I could not return to the larboard side of the brig where the boat lay, for the flames had cut off all passage that way. I dropped over the starboard side, intending to swim round to the sma’ boat. I had scarcely touched the water, when there was an explosion o’ a barrel o’ powder that had been on board. I was sort

o' stunned by the concussion, but I did not lose my senses altogether, for I managed to cast my arm round the mast that had fallen close by me. It was black and charred, and had been in a blaze when it fell; but the water had soon put it out, and it did not hurt me when I griped it."

"An' did the villains no seek to help ye?"

"I canna tell. When I came to myself,—that is, when I was just able to look about me, I could see nothing of the sma' boat anywhere, and nothing of the brig, bar-rin' bits o' wreck."

"They thocht ye had been blawn to pieces, and nae doot didna fash themsel's muckle to look for ye."

"Onyway, they made aff wi' speed; but to be sure it was early morning and hazy, so that I could not see far. There were two or three bits of only partially burnt rope at the upper end of the mast. I worked mysel' along till I got there, and then worked mysel' back to

the thick end. I got the ropes knotted into one, and then I passed it round my body under the arms, and so lashed myself to the mast. The waves were buffeting me about right and left, and if I hadna tied mysel' up that way ye wadna hae seen me here, Girzie, for I never could hae held on lang enough."

"Was ye no cauld?" queried Wattie.

"Aye, cauld and weary too before all was over, Wattie. Heaven only kens how the life kept in my body a' the while, for I floated about for more than thirty hours—all through that day, all through that night, and into the middle of the next day. I was numbed and stiff and mad wi' drouth, while the water was dashing me about and deaving me wi' its mighty roar that seemed like the voice o' God himsel' rebuking me for whatever ill I had done in the world, and bringing to my mind every act of my life frae the time I was a bairn. I prayed for help and strength, and as I was praying the mighty voice seemed to

saften doon to the low sweet sang o' a mither rocking her wean to sleep on her knee. Then that seemed to fade awa' too, and I became insensible."

"Puir sowl," ejaculated Girzie, deftly turning the herrings on to a plate.

"When I came to mysel' again," Falcon went on, breathing hard as if the memory renewed some of the anguish he had endured, "I was on the deck o' a ship wi' a number o' men about me. It was the king's frigate *Victory* that had picked me up. They were kindly folk from the captain down—it was the captain himsel' who had seen me first floating in the water. They took good care of me, and in a week I was able to be up and about."

"Guid be praised, it was a wonnerfu' deliverance."

"It was that, Girzie, woman. I was obliged to take service on board the frigate, and as she was out on a twelvemonth's cruise, I had no

way of getting back here till that time was up. I made the best of the circumstances and was thankful. The captain was pleased with me, and a week ago when we put in at Southampton he gave me leave at once. I got a passage in a coasting schooner which was bound for Ayr, and here I am."

"Draw in your stool, syne, an' eat something," was Girzie's homely comment, adding as she was obeyed: "an' haena ye heard ought o' what's been gaun on here a' the while ye hae been awa'?"

"No a cheep. I wrote to Jeanie frae Malta, but I dinna ken even if she got the letter."

Girzie's head dipped over her plate as if anxious to pick her herring clean. They were eating with their fingers, forks being luxuries of which she only possessed one, and that was rusted: knives were almost as scarce.

She was puzzled. Jeanie again, always Jeanie. How was she to tell him?

“Tak’ a daud o’ bannock, man, an mak’ yoursel’ at hame,” she said in a hurry, to prevent the question which she knew was coming, but could not make up her mind how to answer; “od, it’s no every day Girzie Todd has company.”

Wattie came to the rescue. He had brought his seat close to Falcon, whose story had been to him full of the liveliest interest, and who had a vague notion that in some way his own importance was increased the closer he got to the hero.

“And did ye no gang doon amang the fishes ava?” (slightly disappointed apparently on that score).

“No, Wattie, or you wouldna hae seen me here again.”

“Had the king’s ship guns?”

“Aye, big anes.”

That was some consolation to Wattie for the loss of his vision of the kingdom of fishes, and he had innumerable childish questions

to ask about the frigate and her guns, which Falcon, curbing his own desire and expecting every minute that Girzie would speak, good-naturedly endeavoured to satisfy.

“Do ye ken,” said Wattie by and by, with a thoughtful expression, “I was wonnering what way it was Ivan Carrach’s head didna set lowe to the house when he was here the nicht ye gaed awa’, there was sic a bleeze a’ ower him—far redder nor the peat.”

“Carrach here on the night we sailed?” exclaimed Falcon, looking quickly at Girzie.

She was clearing the table, and as Wattie spoke her eyes flashed upon him frowningly.

“Aye, he was here that night,” she answered indifferently.

“I did not know that he was a friend of yours,” eyeing her curiously.

“Frien’ o’ mine!” sharply, “that he’s no. He jist cam’ to speir gin I had ony fish I could sell him as he hadna got eneuch to ser’ him.”

"Then it was something he said to you that caused you to seek me at the Port to warn me not to sail wi' him?"

"I warned ye for reasons o' my ain, an' ye didna heed. There's nae use fashin' about the why o't noo."

"Girzie," he said firmly as he rose, "ye ken mair about the loss o' the *Colin* than ye care to tell; but ye'll hae to tell some day."

"What gin I hae nocht to tell?"

"We'll see; but you have kept me all this time without saying a word o' what I am most anxious to hear. Hoo is Jeanie, and where is she?"

"She's weel eneuch for that matter, an she's at Cairnieford," abruptly and with an uneasy glance at his face, to see if he suspected anything.

"At Cairnieford!—has she gone into service there?"

"Aye, in a kind o' way."

“Has anything happened to Adam and the old wife?”

“Oh they’re baith livin’ yet, and they’re at Cairnieford. Adam met wi’ an accident an’ brak’ his arm an’ maist lost his life. But he’s maist weel again noo, although he’s no able to do onything but an orra job about the farm. Meg Lindsay’s waur nor she was afore, and’s no thocht to live lang.”

“Poor Jeanie, she’s had a sair time o’t with all that.”

“Aye, sair eneuch when she didna ken whaur to get bite or sup if it hadna been for Robin Gray.”

“Heaven prosper him for it; he shall lose nothing by it if I live, an’ I’m no that old but I may hope for the chance yet of proving myself grateful to those who have shown themselves friends when friends were wanted.”

“Bode o’ a silk gown an’ ye’ll surely get a sleeve o’t, and there’s no reason why ye shouldna get the whale o’t afore ye die.”

“I’ll try for’t anyway, Girzie. But what gar’d the auld folk flit? Was the Laird pushing them about the rent?”

“Aye, an’ they could dae naething without Jeanie forbye. Ye see the puir lassie, what wi’ the trouble i’ the bield itsel’, an’ what wi’ the news o’ your death, was jist wearin’ her life oot by inches, when Robin cam’ an’ took them awa’ to Cairnieford a’thegither.”

“The Lord be thanked that they had a friend able and willing to help them. The thocht o’ what he has done gars my heart loup wi’ gratitude. I’ll awa’ to them at once. I canna rest till I hae seen them, and, fegs, I’m almost as anxious to get a grip o’ Cairnie’s hand as to see Jeanie and hear her welcome hame.”

His face was glowing with the pleasure an honest nature feels in recognizing the nobility of another. He was moving to the door when he was arrested by Girzie saying sharply—

“Ye shouldna gang out the nicht. It’ll be late afore ye win there, an’ it’s no just fair no to gie them ony warnin’ o’ your coming. Ye maun min’ they hae a’ been mournin’ for ye as for ane that was dead, an’ ye dinna ken what ill ye micht dae if ye was jist to stap in on them afore they had ony ettlin that ye was i’ the land o’ the livin’.”

“No fear, they’ll be all the more delighted with the surprise.”

“I’m no sae sure aboot that. Ye dinna ken what changes tak’ place after ane’s dead an’ buried, as ye hae been for near a year.”

“What are ye drivin’ at?” he said, turning round, perplexed, for her manner seemed as strange as that night she had waited for him at the Port.

“Naething but what ye micht hae jaloused frae what I hae said a’ready. Do ye min’ what I tauld ye afore ye gaed awa?”

“Aye, ye wanted me not to sail in the *Colin*.”

“An’ I said that gin ye did ye would never be guidman to Jeanie Lindsay. I didna expect’ my words to come true jist in the way they hae dune; but true ye’ll fin’ them.”

His heart, which a moment before had been swelling with pleasurable anticipations of the meeting with Jeanie, and of the joy which his unexpected return safe and well would inspire, suddenly collapsed with vague fear, like a soap-bubble when touched by the finger.

“In God’s name, what’s wrang?” he said huskily and staring fixedly at the woman.

“Weel, I didna want to tell ye o’t, but I suppose ye may as weel hear’t frae me as frae ony ither body, an’ as ye canna gang mony staps without some ane tellin’ ye, I’ll do’t mysel’—Jeanie’s married.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST HOPE.

"She's fair and fause that causes my smart,
I lo'ed her muckle and lang;
She's broken her vow, she's broken my heart,
And I may e'en gae hang."—*Burns*.

Falcon stood with blank stupified face looking at Girzie, as one might do who listens to eerie words spoken from a distance, and feels a terror creep through the blood, while yet the meaning is indistinct. As if seeking the source of that mysterious voice, he by and by slowly looked round the dingy little chamber.

"Aye, an' there was sic fun as ye never saw at the hame-coming," exclaimed Wattie, chuckling over the memory of the feast of which he had been a partaker with the others.

That roused him. The suggestion of the

merrymaking and the feast brought his wandering thoughts back to the bare fact. The form of the old fishwife, standing before him with hands resting on her hips, watching with her keen friendly eyes, and of her son, crouching by the fire chuckling over that pleasant memory, became plain to him again; and the expression of stupifaction gave place to a dark scowl.

“Married!” he ejaculated with fierce bitterness. “Jeanie’s married?—to wha?”

“Deed, she jist married him that was her best frien’, when she thocht ye was dead—Cairnieford himsel’.”

“What! a man near as auld’s her father,” he began with a hoarse laugh that seemed to wring his heart. Then, making a violent effort to keep cool, to hold back the fever that was tingling through his veins—“when did it happen?”

“At the end o’ hairst.”

“So soon?—Oh, I wish to Heaven I had

been drooned rather than have come back to learn this. She could forget me in twa or three months, an' gie hersel' to an auld man like Cairnieford, just for meat an' drink an' claes! She that said she would wait for me come what might. I was a fool—a fool to lippen to her. But I may be thankful I hae missed her—she never cared a button for me—she couldna hae cared or she would never hae dune this. She wasna grieved that I gaed awa', and no doubt she was glad to hear that I could never come back, and that was why she was so ready to believe't."

He spoke with wild bitterness—evidently too frenzied to understand what he was saying.

"Hoots, man, I wonner to hear ye," broke in Girzie sharply. "What was the lassie to do? She was clean distrackit aboot the loss o' ye. But gin ye had been really drooned, as we a' believed ye was, would it hae brocht ye back to life or dune ye ony guid for Jeanie

to hae let her faither an' mither starve, and hersel' pine awa' to the kirkyard? Gae 'wa, gin there's onybody to blame it's yoursel' for flinging awa' to unknown parts an' no lettin' us ken whether ye was livin' or dead."

This common-sense view of the case might have had a proper effect upon him at another time; but at present he was smarting under the severest pangs a faithful heart can know. The one object which had absorbed all the strength and hope of his life had been suddenly swept away from him, and he was like a ship labouring in a storm without compass or beacon to guide the mariner to a haven.

In such a condition he was not likely to appreciate Girzie's sensible remarks; and instead of replying to them he grasped his stick savagely, wheeled about, and strode out of the cot.

Girzie went to the door to look after him, half intending to call him back. The cold

frosty wind blew sharp in her face, and the darkness only permitted her to obtain a glimpse of his form as he crossed the feeble ray of light shining from a cotter's window, and disappeared immediately.

"There'll be fine doings the morn," she said as she closed the door. "I'll hae to be ower braw an' early to let them ken wha's come hame. Hech, sirs, but he was sair ta'en up about it, and there's nae saying what he may dae. But there was nae use trying to dae ony guid wi' him the nicht. There'll be an unco shine, or I'm mista'en."

Falcon had been stunned by the revelation, the truth of which had been thrust on him with singular force by Wattie's simple exclamation about the "hame-coming." But for that he would have been slow to credit the announcement in spite of all the seriousness of Girzie's manner. Then a sharp pain had thrilled him and he had been stirred to a species of blind frenzy, in which he saw only

a deceitful woman who had been false and treacherous to the love she had plighted.

He had been working and striving to make a home for her; every thought and hope of his life had been concentrated on her, and now all combined with every hardship he had endured to render her falsehood the more base and cruel. An army of angry thoughts were marching and countermarching—all in order of battle—through his mind as he strode furiously up the narrow dark street.

He had no idea as to his destination when he had so abruptly left Girzie's cot. He had in an angry way felt that as she spoke in defence of Jeanie she could not sympathize with him; dimly, too, he had felt that if he were to remain, it would only be to make a fool of himself by uttering the passionate words which were seething in his brain, and so he had wheeled about and left her.

It was all very well for *her* to believe that he had been drowned; but even if it had

been true she would not have been in such a hurry to marry if she had ever cared for him with one-half the fervour with which he had been devoted to her. That was the burden of the unuttered wail that was ringing in his brain, with a sound as sharp and shrill to him as if some one had been shrieking it in his ears.

He took no account of the circumstances Girzie had explained to him; he made no allowances for the pressure that had overborne the opposition of Jeanie's own desires. How could he? It is never an easy thing for one to realize the changes consequent on one's death; and least of all when one returns to life, as it were, and finds the changes made, and when the heart is quivering with violent wrath and anguish.

The lights from the windows of the houses flashed upon him as he strode rapidly up the street, and those flashes of light only served to render the darkness of the night deeper.

Several stumbles on the uneven road, and most of all the keen frosty wind which came whistling round the houses up from the sea, had the effect of recalling him in some degree to his calmer self.

So, by the time he had reached the head of the brae, and was turning into the dark country road where the town ended in a few straggling cottages, it suddenly occurred to him that whilst he was blaming Jeanie for being so ready to take advantage of the report of his death, he was a little too ready himself in crediting the story of her marriage. That was quite a new idea. Girzie might have been jesting with him, and he had left her so abruptly that he had not given her time to explain the hoax.

Aye, but she spoke too plainly to be misunderstood; and there could be no question that Wattie's exclamation was genuine. Still it might be. At any rate he ought in justice to Jeanie to take some immediate step to

confirm the statement he had received or prove its falseness.

It was the drowning man clutching at a straw; and never did one in peril of life clutch more eagerly at the shadow of hope.

He had turned already to retrace his steps when he observed a black line rising up through the darkness of the night. It was the kirk-steeple, and that suggested to him the surest way of setting his doubts at rest with the least delay.

He proceeded straight to the manse—a plain white-washed house which was separated from the kirkyard only by a row of firs, a low wall, and a long strip of garden. A little gate in the wall communicated with the graveyard and the kirk, so that every Sabbath the minister had only to traverse the length of his garden and step into his pulpit.

The glebe, consisting of about twenty acres of land, lay behind the manse. The corn and

wheat stacks, the byre and cart-shed, stood close by the house, and gave it the appearance of a farm-steading.

The minister had just returned from a hard day's work visiting his country parishioners, whose dwellings lay at such distances apart that he had walked over thirty miles since breakfast time; and would have had to walk farther if it had not been for the occasional "lifts" he obtained in cart or gig that happened to be journeying his way. He possessed what is regarded as one of the prime qualifications for a rural Scottish pastorship, considerable capabilities as a pedestrian. Exercise agreed with his hearty nature, and sent the exhilarated blood dancing through his veins, making him feel comfortable in spite of the frost and fatigue.

Fatigued enough he was when he reached home, and it was not altogether agreeable to have the little leisure he had so well earned disturbed by that indication of a call to new

duties supplied by the intimation of the buxom servant lass—

“There’s a man wantin’ to see ye this minute, maister.”

“Bid him come ben, lass,” was Mr. Monduff’s cheery answer.

But the minister’s wife—a little body with a serious face that reflected a placid disposition—did not regard the interruption quite so lightly as her husband. She, however, showed no more displeasure than might be implied in looking with a grave expression at the personage who was ushered into the homely parlour, as if by that means mildly rebuking him for disturbing the leisure of her husband.

Both minister and minister’s wife, however, started with surprise and pleasure as soon as the light fell on the visitor’s face.

“Preserve us!” they exclaimed together, “it’s James Falcon come back.”

And in an instant his hands were seized

by the kindly couple, and he was forced on to a chair in front of the cheery fire.

“Aye, it’s me, Mr. Monduff,” he said dazedly; “but don’t ask me anything till you have answered me one question.”

“I’ll answer a dozen of them first if you like. Man, we’re so well pleased to see you safe that we can afford to wait to learn how you come to be so.”

Falcon looked at the serious face of Mrs. Monduff; probably he felt that the woman’s heart would understand the anguish of his own best.

“Is it true that Jeanie Lindsay’s married?”

The minister and his wife exchanged a quick glance. Then the latter answered him gravely, but with sympathy in the low tone—

“Yes, it’s true—she has married a good warm-hearted man.”

Falcon’s eyes slowly descended to the floor and rested there. He passed his hand over

his head, bowing it forward on his chest, and his body was bent as if his muscles had become relaxed and powerless.

The minister and his wife eyed him with kindly pity; but neither spoke for several minutes. Then, when he begun to breathe heavily, Mr. Monduff touched him on the shoulder.

“What’s wrang wi’ you, James?” he said.

Falcon looked up with a shudder, like one waking from a nightmare.

“It’s my whole life that’s wrang—for it was a’ bound up in that woman. Ye needna tell me that it was sinful to care so much for ony human creature—I ken a’ that; but body and soul I was devoted to her. I would hae gi’en my life ony day if it could hae spared her a pain. And now!——it’s a’ by; it’s a’ by, and I carena what comes o’ me.”

Mrs. Monduff silently placed her hand on his, in that simple way showing the woman’s sympathy for the distressed lover. But the

minister leaned back on his chair, his ruddy visage acquiring a solemn expression.

“You’re no quite sensible of the full meaning o’ your words, James,” he said presently; “wherefore I’ll make no remarks on them. Some day I’ll aiblins show ye what a sorry thing it would be for you if you were taken at your word. Meanwhile it vexes me to think that a lad like you, who has been trained in a manner under my own hand, should ever have been able to speak that way, no matter what the provocation might be.”

“Ah, sir, you don’t, you can’t understand what I am suffering.”

“Maybe no, and maybe in consequence I’m the better able to see the cure for your malady.”

“Cure! There is none. What cure can there be for the destruction of the dearest object of one’s life? when every spark of courage a man owned is crushed out wi’ the sense that there is nothing to hope for,

nothing to live for—what is there that can kindle his courage again? If a man's two arms are nipped off at the shoulders, is there anything in the world that can stick them on again?"

"That's a metaphorical way of putting it; but metaphors are kittle things to handle. They sound unco grand, but they can seldom haud up against a blast of common sense. You hae got your arms yet, and I hope they'll do some good work before you die, for all your present distress. No doubt when we have set our hearts upon a thing and lose it, we cannot help skirling out and feeling as if the world had a' gane wrang. But, man, there's ay a compensation somewhere for the worst of ills, and there's a compensation for yours too."

"I wish I could see it then," he cried bitterly, and with an impulse to rise and quit the house at once to avoid further discussion.

"You said just now that you would hae

given your life at any minute to spare the lass a pain. Did you no?"

"Aye, and I would have done it too, gladly."

"Then, if you mean what you say, instead o' talking in the fashion you have been doing about Jeanie's marriage, you ought to thank God that in the time of sorest distress—distress that was as much owing to the news of your death as to the misfortunes of her family—there was a friend to help her out of her trouble. That ought to be some compensation to you for the loss of her yourself."

Falcon rose, confused and agitated.

"Thank you, Mr. Monduff, thank you. I cannot view the matter so calmly as you do yet. But I'll go now. I did not mean to stay so long. Good night."

"Where are you going to?" said the minister, staying him, and not quite sure that it was safe to permit him to go away in his present excited condition; "to Clashgirn?"

“No, not there. I did not think about it.”

“Aye, well, you’d better stay here to-night. You look wearied, and the mistress will make up a bed for you directly. We’ll not speak any more about this matter, and you’ll be more yourself after you’ve had a sleep.”

Falcon objected, but the minister insisted and the minister’s wife persuaded, so that he was forced to yield.

A bed was speedily prepared for him in a cupboard-like chamber off the parlour, and as soon as it was ready Falcon retired to it.

He did not undress, but threw himself on the bed with a sense of severe physical as well as mental exhaustion. His pulse throbbed violently; his head ached and burned as if his brain had been on fire.

When Mr. Monduff called him next morning he received no answer. Opening the door he entered the chamber and found it untenanted.

Falcon had gone—when they could not

discover; but the servant had been up at six o'clock, and she had not heard him moving. The front door had been unbolted; but that had not excited the girl's alarm in the least, as it was frequently left so all night.

"He was so wild-like last night that I was afraid to let him go," said the minister to his wife. "I hope the lad may not be driven in his crazy state to do some harm to himself or other folk. I should hae kept him fast wi' lock and key."

And after breakfast the minister sallied forth in search of Falcon.

CHAPTER XV.

BROKEN HEARTS.

“For sure ’t would break thy tender heart,
My breaking heart to see;
Wi’ a’ the wrangs and waes it tholed,
And yet maun thole for thee.”—*R. Jamieson.*

The guidman of Cairnieford was up early on the dark December morning which succeeded the night of James Falcon’s return. He was bound for a distant market, where he proposed to buy a lot of sheep and expected to get a bargain. The guidwife made his breakfast, fastened his plaid across his shoulders, and gave him kindly counsel to be careful of the road coming home if it happened to be dark before he started.

Robin promised obedience, though he declared at the same time he had ridden the road “hunners o’ times in a’ kinds o’ weathers

and never met in wi' onything waur nor himsel'."

Jeanie watched him ride away in the hazy morning light and disappear at the end of the by-road. Her cheeks had recovered some of their former bloom, and her form much of its plumpness, since she had been married; and she looked now a sonsy, good-tempered, and happy wife.

She was about to return to the house when she heard some of the hens cackling proudly in the little thicket of firs and beeches at the back of the steading, and like a thrifty farmer's wife she started immediately in search of the eggs, which were prized all the more because of their scarcity at this season.

She entered the thicket and begun her search at a pile of fir branches which had been hewn down for winter firewood, and the numerous recesses in which presented favourable-looking hiding-places for wily hens to deposit their eggs.

Jeanie heard the crisp earth and the dead frosted bits of branches which were thickly strewn about crackling under the footsteps of somebody approaching. As she passed round the high pile of firewood, bending low to examine the nooks, she noticed a man coming toward her. She thought from the cursory glimpse she had obtained that he was one of the men belonging to the place, and continued her inspection unheeding.

She passed round the pile of wood slowly to the side from which she had observed the man, and there he stood before her.

Pale, haggard, with touzled hair, ruffled clothes, and a general appearance of wild disorder, the man stood watching her.

She gazed at him a moment, and then she flung up her hands with a shriek that echoed throughout the thicket and sank moaning to the ground.

He lifted her up. She was not unconscious,

and she shuddered at his touch. He seemed sensible of her repulsion, and he placed her on a heap of the fir branches, drawing back a pace to look at her. She covered her eyes with her hands, as if to hide him from her sight.

“Jeanie, I hae come back,” he said presently in a hard cold tone.

She made no answer, but she rocked her body to and fro, sobbing wildly.

He spoke again slowly.

“I hae come back, Jeanie, to find that ye shudder at my touch—that ye canna bear to look me in the face. And yet it was you that no so very lang syne clasped your arms around my neck, and told me that I might leave you without fear of change, for that you would bide my coming faithfully. Hae ye kept your word?”

He bent close to her, hissing the question in her ear.

She seemed to writhe under his approach, and still with hands on her eyes she swayed to and fro, moaning.

“They tauld me ye were drooned,” she cried in anguish. “They tauld me ye were drooned, and oh my heart was sair to think it. But ye made nae sign that ye were living, and a’ body spoke as though there was nae doot—as though there could be nane. There wasna ane to whisper a breath o’ hope, and what could I do—what could I do but believe when the proof was so strong?”

“Ye could hae waited a wee for confirmation o’ the news. Oh, woman, I would hae waited a hundred years before I would hae cast you so utterly from my breast as to take another in my arms.”

“And I would hae waited for ever, had I been my lane. But they pressed me sair on a’ hands. I was wae, wae, and heart-broken; I didna care what cam’ o’ me; but I thocht it was a sin to turn awa’ frae the wark that

was set fornenst me; and I thocht that you, looking at me frae the ithier world, would ken what feelings moved me, and would say I had done weel. That was why I married, though my heart was wi' you."

The violence of her distress, the sad sincerity of her voice, exerted a powerful influence upon him. He seemed to waken suddenly from a fever, in which all things had been distorted in his mind, to the consciousness that she had been true to him in heart—that she had loved him—that she still loved him.

He dropped down beside her, and threw his arms round her.

"Jeanie, Jeanie!" he cried passionately, "ye are mine yet, ye shall ay be mine in spite o' a' the marriages on earth. What power—what richt has a minister's prayer to part our lives—to fill the years that are before us wi' lingering misery? It shall hae none. Ye are mine, Jeanie, my ain, and

nobody else has a richt to claim you. Rise up, then, and come awa' from this place, and in another country we'll find a home and happiness."

With a stifled cry of horror she wrenched herself from his arms, and sprung to her feet. Her hands were withdrawn from her eyes now, and she regarded him with wild alarm, whilst her cheeks, which a moment before had been pallid and cold, became crimson.

"Awa', man, awa'," she exclaimed, with look and voice of horror; "that's no Jeames Falcon wha has risen from the dead—for he would hae pitied me and tried to strengthen me for the cruel duty I maun do. It's the evil ane himsel' in my puir lad's body that's come to tempt me to my shame."

He bowed his head before her indignation, and for the moment could not meet her gaze.

"Lord help me, Lord help me," he groaned; "I believe I'm crazed. Ye are richt, it was a mad thought—a villanous thought. I'll

try to put it away from me. I *shall* put it away; only give me a little while to master myself. Last nicht I came back, and last nicht I learned you were married. My head's been in a creel ever since, and I scarcely ken what I do, or say, or think."

"Oh, why did you no come hame sooner—why did ye send nae word that ye were livin'?"

"I couldna win hame, but I sent a letter, and that ye never got, I suppose."

"Never, or I wouldna hae been here the day."

He pressed his head tightly between his hands, as if by that means to subdue its violent throbbing, and so obtain a calmer view of the position.

"Aye, aye, I see it's been a' bad luck that has come between us and parted us for ever," he went on hoarsely and hopelessly; "but I'm no the villain you might think me from what I hae said. I didna come here thinking

o' that. I came just to speak wi' you once again—to look at ye—and gang awa'."

Her indignation and her fear of him had quite disappeared now. Above the storm of different emotions which was raging in her breast, pity for him rose strongest of all. She approached him slowly and placed her hands on his head soothingly. He snatched the hands between his own and kissed them frenziedly.

"Dinna do that," she sobbed, trembling as with intense cold. "Ah, dinna do that, for it frichtens me and minds me o' what you were saying enoo. I canna thole to think o' that, because it would make the sorrow I hae to bear a' the sairer if I had to think o' ye as ane that would do a wrang act."

"No man shall ever say I wranged him," said Falcon proudly and releasing her hands.

"I believe that. I'll never doubt it again. Ye're speaking like yoursel' noo, and it comforts me to hear ye. But, Jeamie, we may

do wrang in thocht to oursel's and others,
and there's only ae way that we can ever
hope to win peace o' mind by."

"And that way?"

"Is to part noo, and never—never meet
again in this world."

Her hands were clasped. She gazed appealingly at him, but he did not raise his head or speak for a long time. When he did look up his face was white and his lips were quivering.

"Aye, that's a' we can do now. It's cowardly to sob and greet like a wean when the road lies before me, dreary though it be."

"Ye'll forget a' this, and I'll pray day and nicht that Heaven will send ye happy days."

"I'll no forget, but maybe I may obtain distraction in hard work and new scenes. Folk say that time cures a' ills, and I could maist believe that, seeing that you looked so content before you saw me" (bitterly).

"Jeamie, let me tell ye a' that's passed since

ye gaed awa’,” she said quietly, although smarting under the sting of his reproach; “and when ye hae heard ye’ll be better able to judge how far I am to blame for what pain ye are suffering.”

She told him everything simply as it had occurred, and he listened in moody silence. But when she had finished he rose to his feet.

“Thank you, Jeanie,” he said in a calmer tone than he had yet spoken; “what you hae said proves to me that nae blame can rest on you. I would hae thought that anyway if I had only had time to think the matter fairly out. But there’s one to whose villain’s work you and I both owe what ill has happened us, and I’ll bring him to the gallows for’t.”

“Wha do ye mean?”

“Ivan Carrach, who was skipper o’ the *Colin*.”

And he briefly explained to her how the brig had been burned, how he had escaped, and what had been the cause of his long absence.

“I’ll no trouble you again, Jeanie,” he said in conclusion; “this is the last time I’ll ever look on your dear face. Dinna shrink frae me or fear me because I call it dear. My anger and my frenzy are by now, and I’m calm. But your face will ay be dear to me although I may never look on it again. I’ll never come back here: as soon as I hae got haud o’ Carrach, I’ll leave the country, and ye can think o’ me as though I had been dead and had never come here to disturb the peace o’ your hame wi’ memories o’ days that were very pleasant to us.”

His voice quivered as he spoke, and burning tears started to his eyes. She allowed him to clasp her hands now without hesitation, and her half-stifled sobs declared how violently her heart was agitated since the moment of parting had arrived.

It was a sad parting, for it was lightened by no gleam of hope: it was like the parting which death makes. They had spoken much,

but they had thought and felt far more than their words indicated during the little time they had been together. The bitter experience of a life was concentrated in that brief space, and the issue was a noble one. The suppressed love she had borne the man had been suddenly roused into new existence, and had fought hard with her sense of wifely duty and gratitude to the absent husband. The contest had closed in the stern recognition of the true path before her; and whatever agony it might cost her, she was ready to tear from her breast the love that had been once her happiness, but was now a sin.

He had passed through the frenzy of his shattered hopes, the storm of angry passions, and had reached the light wherein he saw how much he had wronged her by his thoughts of the past night and how much he owed her now. It seemed to him as if he heard the voice of his dead love loudly bidding him depart from her and leave her to what peace

she might obtain from the knowledge that he was never to cross her path any more.

Yet they lingered with a fatal fascination over the love they were burying in this separation. Their hearts might ache and yearn; but they were never again to find voice for the pain or hope, never again to reach the light of lovers' sympathy.

"It maun be, it maun be," she cried at last; "a' that I am suffering the noo, a' the weary pain that's rugging at my heart in the thocht o' parting wi' ye, but tells me the stronger that we maun never meet on this earth mair. Oh I lo'ed ye, Jeamie, very dearly. I lo'e ye yet—the Lord aboon forgive me—but I am Robin Gray's wife, and I maun be faithful to him wha's been guid and true to me. Help me, help me, Jeamie, and gang awa'."

"God keep ye, Jeanie," he gasped, with unutterable misery and compassion choking his voice. "I see noo that I haena the warst to

bear. I wish in my soul that I had never come hame again, or that we had never loved as we hae done. God keep ye, and bless ye, and gie ye strength, for we hae little in oursel's. But ye shall never be troubled wi' the sicht o' me again, and if I could I would bury my very name in the bottomless pit that ye might never mair be startled even by the sound o't. A' that man can do to help ye to be a true wife I'll do for the sake o' the love I bear ye. I canna say ony mair."

With an uncontrollable impulse he folded his arms round her and kissed her passionately, whilst scalding tears were on their faces.

"Gae'wa, gae'wa," she cried wildly, tearing herself from his arms; "and Heaven guide ye to happiness, if there be ony in this world."

She turned from him, blind with anguish, and tottered away toward the house.

He stood dumbly gazing after her, and as she disappeared round the corner of a shed, without having dared to look back once, his

whole heart seemed to burst in one great sob.

“God bless ye, Jeanie,” he faltered, and the words yearningly followed her.

He gazed vacantly for a long time at the place where he had caught the last glimpse of her retreating form, and then, with a dull hopeless face, he turned slowly away.

Moving toward the road, he paused often to look back, as if with the vain hope that he might see her once again. But slowly as he moved down the glen with the clear burn rippling and murmuring by his side, gradually the house and every vestige of her home were screened from his eyes by intervening trees—bare, gaunt, and dead, like his own hopes.

He went down to the shore and seated himself on a detached boulder of rock. The red winter sun was glinting over the rolling wayes, and the waves, as they kissed the beach foamily and rolled back, seemed to

moan despairingly in unison with his miserable thoughts. The sharp wind beat upon his cheeks—but he was insensible to its biting cold. He gazed steadily out over the tossing waters, as if he found some comfort in their unceasing commotion. By and by the fantasy seized him that the waves were beckoning and calling to him.

“Aye, aye,” he groaned; “out yonder lies my home. I’ll be wi’ you soon (moving his hand as to a friend in the distance), but first I must find Carrach, for he has wrought a’ this wrang to her and me—curse him! curse him! curse him!”

He rose and paced the beach excitedly. His despair seemed to find vent and even relief in his furious wrath against the man to whom he attributed all his misfortune. He proposed to visit Clashgirn, and discover from the Laird where the skipper might be found, and also obtain his assistance in bringing him to punishment. But it was

late in the afternoon before he reached his old home.

When Jeanie had quitted him she had paused a few minutes as soon as the corner of the house hid her from his sight. She had been too much confused to think of how the effects of the violent agitation she had undergone might be concealed from the eyes of her father and mother, and most of all from those of the servants.

She wiped her face with her apron, but she felt that it was parched and white. She looked timidly about, and was not disturbed by discovering any observer. Then she stole to the house, more like a thief, she felt, than the mistress of it, without meeting her father or any of the lassies. She reached her bedroom, washed herself, and carefully dried her face; but when she looked in the little mirror she was startled by the change which had come over it during the last hour, and which all her efforts were powerless to re-

move. The experience of an age was marked upon it, and it seemed to her almost haggard.

She turned away frightened, and bathed her face in the cold water again. How was she to meet Robin with such a wae-stricken look as that? She must not make him unhappy too by telling him what had happened—that is, not until she was able to speak quietly about it, and so relieve his kind heart of all fear or pain on her account.

That was the one thing clear to her mind; that nothing must be said about that sad meeting in the thicket meanwhile. It was the first time Jeanie had ever had anything to hide, and she was ashamed of it; but it was for his sake, not her own. She had noticed on one or two occasions how a passing reference to Falcon had caused him to glance uneasily at her. Why should she disturb him now by letting him know what misery she was suffering?

No, she would wait until she had taught

herself to think and speak quietly of the matter, and then he might be told all about it when she would be able to assure him at the same time of her own content.

So when her father asked what was the matter with her, she answered that she was not "just weel," and busied herself with her household affairs, preparing to meet her husband with a calm face, and her great sorrow hidden in her breast.

It was a false step she was taking; but it was a generous motive that urged her to it. How was she to guess what was to follow?

CHAPTER XVI.

PAWKY REYNARD.

“He’s a rare auld man, wi’ a wig on his pow,
An’ a sneishan mull to prie, O;
He becks an’ he bows to high and to low,
An’ he cheats them a’ for his fee, C.”—*Old Song.*

The Laird had been down at the byre looking over his cattle, and he was peaceably stepping up the short avenue to the house when he heard somebody striding rapidly after him. He glanced over his shoulder, and observing a stranger, halted and wheeled about to learn his mission.

The stranger was by his side in a moment.

“Well, I hope you’re glad to see me back again, although I dinna ken why I should hope that, seeing I hae so little pleasure in’t mysel’,” was the somewhat gruff salutation of the stranger.

The Laird's clean-shaven chin dropped, and his mouth remained open; he dropped his staff, and what was of more consequence, he dropped his snuff-box, spilling the precious contents.

"It canna be you!" he stammered, wishing that he could reach the house with one step, and yet quite unable to move a limb.

"Aye, but it's just me, unfortunately," said Falcon drily, and picking up the staff he placed it in McWhapple's hand.

The Laird leaned on his staff, and shivered violently as with fright—not the fright which superstition inspires. There was more fear roused in his thin, dried, pawky body by the re-appearance of the living man than all the ghosts of the kirkyard marching up the avenue in a band could have produced. He eyed him from head to foot, and still shivering stooped to pick up his snuff-box.

"Od, its extraordinar'," he exclaimed, as he raised himself, "an' me has been mourning

for ye this towmond as though ye'd been dead, and you no dead ava!"

"I'm sorry you hae wasted so much useful grief for a chield wha's so ungrateful as to come to life again."

"Come to life again—aye, man, it's jist like that," exclaimed McWhapple, evidently uncomfortable, and searching Falcon's face with cunning eyes, almost as if trying to discover whether he came with friendly intent or the reverse. "I can scarcely believe it's you yet. But come your ways to the house, and let us ken a' about it."

As they walked together the Laird watched his companion with side-long glances, and whenever he found himself observed, he uttered an exclamation of marvel, as if to indicate that his glances were purely those of natural wonder and satisfaction.

Without having encountered any one, they entered the parlour in which the important interview regarding the farm of Askaig had

been held, and from which all Falcon's mishaps dated.

The Laird placed a decanter and glasses on the table—he kept them in the cupboard at the side of the chimney, so that they were always handy, and always locked up by himself. He emptied a full glass of the whisky—a very unusual thing for him to do—and sunk back on his easy chair, staring open-mouthed at his visitor.

Falcon, partly by accident, partly by the recall of old habit in association with the place, planted himself on the hearth much as he had done on the day of that interview he remembered so bitterly. He observed that the place was exactly as he had left it, and whilst he was indifferently glancing round, the Laird was summing up the changes in him.

First, he was bronzed by the sun: that added to his apparent age. Next, he had been suffering greatly, and that had imparted a nervous firmness to the lips, which denoted

that he would be an unflinching and uncompromising foe. Altogether, he looked much older, sadder, and shrewder than many men who had ten years the advantage of him.

These observations did not apparently in the least comfort McWhapple, for two or three times that shivering fit touched him as if threatening to return. The whisky, however, kept it off, and he continued to look at him with an expression of astonishment, suspicion, and cunning watchfulness all combined. Certainly the Laird's conduct was as peculiar as the occasion of it. He was not usually subject to any great display of surprise; and even at this moment it did not seem to be so much surprise that moved him as a potent fear of something about to happen.

Falcon, however, attributed all this discomposure to the mere effect of his unexpected return, and to relieve him told him at once how he had escaped.

“Od, it's the most extraordinary thing I

ever heard," exclaimed McWhapple after a pause; "and, noo that ye hae got back, I suppose you hae heard that your auld sweet-heart's married?"

"Aye, I hae seen her"—(wincing).

"Hae ye so! And what do you intend to do now?"

"Go away again."

"When?"—(with marked eagerness).

"As soon as I hae performed a duty that I owe you and others."

"What may that be?"

"Did you lose muckle by the *Colin*?"

"No so muckle as I might hae done"—(uneasily)—"for she was gey well insured."

"Humph"—(eyeing him curiously)—"Did Carrach lose onything by it?"

"I couldna say exactly; he had a share o' the cargo and got his share o' the insurance; but, on the other hand, he lost a heap o' time, and the chance o' what he was to make by the cargo he was to bring hame."

“That’s queer”—(thoughtfully).

“What’s queer?”—(sharply, and moving uncomfortably on his seat).

“About Carrach. Where is he?”

“He was at Greenock yesterday, I believe, and I’m expecting him here in a day or twa. But what are ye driving at wi’ a’ these questions?”

“At a serious matter to you, and at a matter that has ruined my—but never mind that. Hae you ony suspicion how the brig was burnt?”

The Laird slowly searched the corners of his box for a pinch of snuff.

“Weel, Jeames, if you compel me to answer that question, I’ll hae to say something unpleasant.”

“Say it, then.”

“As you like. Then, the proofs that I got privately argued strongly that she was set on fire purposely.”

“Just so; and by whom?”

“By yoursel’.”

“By me—what for?”

“Out o’ spite against me for no doing what you wanted me to do. But I hae kept that under my thumb, and I commanded Carrach never to speak o’t to anybody, so that ye need fear naething. But, Jeames, if it was true, it was a bad payment to me for a’ that I hae done for you.”

“So it would hae been if it had been true; but that’s the very thing I am to bide here for a week or two to prove—that it was not true, and that it was Carrach himself who fired the brig.”

The Laird shook his head doubtingly.

“I’m glad to ken that you werena so vicious as to do such a thing against me; but you’ll find it a stiff job to bring hame that charge to Carrach when he has the affidavits o’ a’ the men on his side.”

“That does not matter; Hutcheson and I saw him.”

"Aye! and where is Hutcheson?"

Falcon was silent; for the question reminded him sharply that the vengeance he had calculated upon taking so promptly was utterly beyond his reach until he could produce Hutcheson to corroborate his own evidence.

"I must find him," he said at length.

"I'm misdoubting that 'll take you a lang while; for he hasna been back here since he gaed awa in the unfortunate *Colin*."

"Never mind, I'll find him. The insurance agent will perhaps be able to tell me in what ship he sailed, and I'll find him."

McWhapple gave vent to that peculiarly Scotch ejaculation which is made with closed lips; the only combination of letters which can in any way represent the sound being, "oom-hoo." Then, after having apparently thought over the matter, he said—

"You're determined to pursue this affair?"

“Aye, till he has been hanged—curse him.”

“What makes ye so wild against him?”

“Because a’ the bad luck that’s happened me has been brought about by his work.”

“I understand what you mean; but do you intend to take ony advice frae me regarding the business?”

“I expect both your advice and help; for surely you have some interest in it, seeing that you still employ the villain.”

“Oh, surely, I hae a very great interest in it, and you shall hae both my advice and help. My advice, however, you’re no like to take, for it is just to let sleeping dogs lie, or, at any rate, be cannie in touching them. I’m no misdoubting a word o’ what you say; but Carrach has the upper hand o’ ye the now, and if he heard that you were trying to bring such a charge against him, do you think he’d haud his tongue about you?”

“What could he do?”

“Put a stop to your ever finding Hutcheson. He’s got the proof against ye, and he’d just clap ye into jail in a minute. Ye’d be tried and transported—aiblins hanged—afore ye ken’d whare ye was. That’s what he could do.”

“I’ll give him the chance,” said Falcon resolutely, and McWhapple’s hawk eyes twinkled feebly.

“Then ye’ll get a halter for your pains, I’m thinking. Na, na, lad, ye must gang about it in a sensible way. Ye’ll say nothing to the insurance agent yet. You’ll just bide a wee till Carrach comes here, and syne I’ll find out frae him in a friendly way what ship it was Hutcheson sailed in. Syne you’ll gang after him and bring him back here, and then ye’ll be able to speak out. That’s the sensible way o’ proceeding, and if ye winna take it, I wash my hands o’ the matter a’thegither.”

Falcon was chagrined and moody at the

prospect of delay; but it seemed clear to him that, as the Laird put it, there was no other course to take with any prospect of success.

He did not observe with what nervous eagerness his counsellor scanned his countenance, as if to read his decision before it was pronounced.

“I believe you’re right, Laird,” he said wearily; “and there’s no help for it. But I don’t care how long it may be before I reach him. I’ll not give up the chase until he has paid wi’ his life for some o’ the misery he has wrought to me and Jeanie.”

“Man, that’s an unco vicious spirit to work wi’. You should be satisfied wi’ trying to get justice done.”

“Oh aye, I’ll be satisfied wi’ justice when it’s done.”

“Oom—hoo,” ejaculated the Laird again, his head making a dab, and his breath coming more freely than it had done during the interview; “and where are you to bide till

Carrach comes? It wouldna do for him to find ye here if I'm to get onything out o' him."

"I don't mean to stay here—it's too near Cairnieford, and I want to get as far from there as possible."

"You ken best about that; but I canna see that you should fash yoursel' regardin' a woman that was ready to loup at the first offer she got as soon as ye were out o' sight——"

"Stop—I'll let no man speak an ill word about her in my presence."

And the fury that flashed to his visage showed that it would be dangerous for any man to attempt it.

"Oh, just as ye like; but, as I was about to remark, it'll no do for ye to be bidin' at ony o' the inns either; so ye might gang ower by to Askaig. There's naebody occupying the house but the ploughman and his wife, and they can make up a bed for ye in ane o' the

empty rooms. Ye'll no be particular about furniture for the wee while ye'll hae to bide there."

"I'll go at once."

"Ye'd better hae a bite o' something to eat first and take a dram. Ye look unco cauld and worn like."

He summoned his housekeeper, Mrs. Begg, and as soon as that worthy woman could recover from the surprise and pleasure of seeing James Falcon in the flesh again, she hastened to procure some food.

Falcon was really worse than he looked; for he had eaten nothing since the meal he had made at Girzie Todd's, and he had passed through much exhausting excitement. Strong as he was, even his constitution bent before the terrible emotions which had been raging in him for the last twenty hours, and the exposure to the cold on the beach. He was, however, as yet, too sick in mind to take any note of bodily fatigue or pain.

As soon as he had partaken of the plentiful repast which the kindly Mrs. Begg had placed before him, he started for Askaig, the Laird promising to visit him next day and give him any news he might have obtained regarding the movements of Carrach.

Askaig was distant, by the shortest road, which lay across the fields, five miles from Clashgirn, and about the same from Cairnieford. Although it was already dark, and a snow-storm threatening, Falcon took the shortest way; if he had thought at all of the danger of being caught in the storm before he had crossed the intervening hills, he was in the humour rather to have welcomed the prospect than to have gone round by the road to avoid it.

The Laird was singularly nervous: that was evinced by the hasty way in which he bade Mrs. Begg to tell one of the men to saddle his pony, and by the trembling way in which he grasped his staff. He muffled

himself up carefully, however, with the assistance of his housekeeper. She ventured to say that it was a "wild-like nicht," and could he "no put off gaun out till the morn;" but he bade her mind her own business in such an angry way that she did not speak another word until he had ridden down the road.

"Confound him," he muttered, giving the reins a jerk, "wha would ever hae thought o' him turning up again, least of a' wi' siccan a purpose. There'll be a fine ado if it gets win', but it maunna—it shallna. I'll hae to get him out o' the country as quick as possible, and while he's in't I'll hae to keep him frae getting friendly words either wi' the agent or Robin Gray. Deil tak' him, can he no mind his ain business like other honest folk?"

By the time this monologue was concluded he had reached the junction of the road which led to Cairnieford, and he heard ringing along the hard frosty ground the hoofs of a horse trotting towards him from the direction of

the town. There was light enough for him to distinguish the form of objects at a few paces distance; and presently he descried the outlines of a man and horse.

“A sharp nicht,” said the horseman, riding past.

The Laird started in his saddle and suddenly drew rein.

“Is that you, Cairnieford?” he cried, hastily turning round. “Haud on a minute, I want to speak wi’ you.”

He rode quietly up to the side of Cairnieford, who had stopped just as he had been about to turn up the glen road.

“You’re late abroad, Laird. What was you gaun to say?”

McWhapple laid his hand on the farmer’s brawny shoulder, and spoke in a tone of friendly compassion.

“I hae news for you, Cairnieford—news that I’m feared will no be ower and above welcome.”

"I would be surprised if it was, coming frae you," was Gray's dry response, shaking off the Laird's hand.

"Man, I dinna ken what for ye hae sic an ill-will to me that ye canna speak a pleasant word, though I hae ay tried to be friendly wi' you in spite o' a' your thrawn ways."

"It's rather a cauld nicht to stand arguing that matter, Laird; sae tell's your news, and let's be jogging."

"Aweel, aweel, be as dour's ye like, ye winna anger me, for I'm satisfied that some day ye'll ken me for the friend I am."

"I'll be weel pleased when that day comes. But dinna forget that I hae ken'd ye, McWhapple, since ye were just a factor, and I was a bit ragged callant rinnin' about. I hae had a lang while to mak' up my mind about ye."

"Aye, man, but you're proud," exclaimed the Laird with the sigh of a martyr, and all

the humility of one who resigns himself to the justice of time; "but dinna ride ower high, or the fa' will be a' the greater."

"I never ken'd ye speak that way, McWhapple," said Cairnieford laughing, "but ye were ay sure o' being able to do or say something unpleasant. Out wi't then, let's ken the warst, for I'm feared o' naething that you or ony man can bring against me."

"There's nobody can bring anything against ye, I'm sure; and there's nobody would do't if they could. But whiles even the best o' us must bow the head to things they canna help. What I hae to tell ye will fear ye and make you wae too, or I'm mista'en."

"Then, in the deil's name, tell't, and no stand licking your chaffs ower't"—(testily).

"I'm loath to speak what'll grieve ye; but, as ye say, the sooner it's told the better, and it would never do for ye to gang hame the nicht without kenning o't. James Falcon wasna drooned as we a' thocht."

He bent close to Gray as he pronounced the words with peculiar significance.

“I’m glad to hear’t, for the lad’s sake,” exclaimed Gray heartily.

“Aye, but he has come back here, and he’s been up at Cairnieford, and seen your guid-wife, and the Lord only kens what’ll happen.”

It was not so much what the Laird said as what he implied that startled Robin Gray, and sent a sickening thrill throughout his strong frame. That was the Laird’s way; he never said anything direct, he did everything by implication.

“Happen?—what can happen?” he exclaimed unsteadily.

“Od, there’s nae saying; but it’s an awkward business for you.”

“I canna see that.”

“Aweel, I hope ye’ll never need to see’t; but ye may count on me helping you in any way that I can.”

“Thank you” — (gathering the reins hastily). “I’m glad ye told me before I got hame, as it’ll help me to prepare mysel’. But the sooner I’m there the better noo. Guid nicht.”

“I hope it winna make so much difference to you as I misdoubt it will; but——”

Robin had galloped away out of hearing before the sentence was finished.

McWhapple turned his pony’s head and continued his way to the village with an especially complacent smirk on his yellow visage.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOUBTS.

“Dear child, how could I wrong thy name?

Thy form so fair and faultless stands,

That, could ill tongues abuse thy fame,

Thy beauty would make large amends.”

—*Hamilton of Bangour.*

There was the murmur of the sea behind him, and the wild sweep of the wind up the glen pushing him forward, whilst the gaunt trees stretched out their bare trembling branches, moaning and forming ominous shadows across his path.

“Aye, the sooner I’m hame the better,” he muttered as he galloped along the road; but the nearer he approached his own house the slower became the pace of his mare Jean, until at last she was permitted to walk.

In a vague way he was conscious of sea,

and wind, and shadows—conscious that they were affecting him in a manner they had never done before. He had never on any former occasion fancied the moan of the sea so sad, the sough of the wind so eerie, or the shadows of the firs so gloomy. His character had been too sharply formed in the severe mould of practical life to permit him to know much of fancy, or to regard nature at any time by its light. That was why the effect of those strange voices of nature, which echo our passions of joy or sorrow according to the humour in which we hear them, seemed so peculiar to him now.

When the light shining in the window of the parlour—placed there by Jeanie's hand to guide him home—became visible, he brought his mare to a stand, much against the animal's will, for she sniffed the stables, and knowing that supper was so near, did not care to linger.

"Bide a wee, lass, bide a wee," said Robin

gently, "let me think a minute and see gin I can look at the matter fair and straight afore I meet her. . . . Puir Jeanie, puir wife—I doubt, I doubt I hae done you and him wrang. But wha was to ken o' this? No me, onyway. . . . My head's a wee thing confused the nicht someway. Aiblins I took ower muckle drink, though I didna feel ony the waur o't till after I met McWhapple—confound his tongue; it seems to me as though it was made o' a gall-bladder that pooshins everything it touches."

He lifted his bonnet and passed his hand over his head abstractedly. His fingers touched the bald crown, and rested there.

"Aye, I'm an auld man," he muttered weariedly; "an' she's but a young lassie, and Jeamie's come hame. What's the upshot?—that she'll turn frae me to him?—for she lo'ed him dearly."

His whole body shook under the violent emotion of the thought. How cold and cheer-

less seemed the glen with the drizzling snow falling softly about him, and the wind soughing in melancholy time to the sharp rippling of the burn. His eyes wandered drearily till they rested on the light shining in the window.

It was beckoning him home, and it seemed to inspire hope and courage.

“Hoots, I’m just an auld goose,” he exclaimed, gathering himself up, as it were, and shaking off the forebodings which rendered him miserable. “Jeamic’s come hame—what about that? She’s my guidwife, and she’s promised to be a true ane. She’s had time to ken how precious she is to me, and she winna desert me now. Fie on me to doubt her for a minute. We’ll just make the puir chield welcome, and try to comfort him a’ that we can. It’s no his fault nor ours either that things are as they are. We’ll just try to make the best o’ them, and no make them waur by quarrelin’ amang oursel’s. Sae ye

can bode as ye like, Laird McWhapple. We're nae gowks, and we ken that what's done canna be undone, and we'll just be content wi' things as they stand."

He was considerably relieved by this decision; and he made a bold effort to break through the gloom that had gathered about him. Jean was permitted to advance at a smart trot, and Robin leaped from the saddle when he reached the door with much of his usual cheeriness.

The door opened before he had time to knock, and Jeanie appeared with a light. The effect of her appearance was to dispel his moody misgivings so completely for the time being, that he did not at first notice how pale she was, or how her hands trembled as she unfastened his plaid.

But whilst he was taking his supper, and answering Adam's questions about the market, he observed that she was unusually silent. That led him in a stealthy way to

examine her face, and he saw then how ill she was looking.

He made no comment, although his heart seemed suddenly to sink, and he felt the gloom returning in spite of the bright fire which shed a warm comfortable glow throughout the room. He went on eating and answering Adam's questions about the number of sheep and cattle in the market, and the prices they obtained, just as if there were nothing disturbing him.

He turned abruptly from the table to the fire. Why was it neither father nor daughter said anything about Falcon? He had been there—McWhapple had said so, and he could believe him to that extent, for he knew that Falcon would be eager to see her, and would no doubt seek her the moment he arrived.

Why then did they conceal the fact from him?

His answers gradually became shorter, and

sometimes he forgot to speak, so that the question had to be repeated.

"I see ye're wearied," said Adam at length, "sae we'll just read a chapter, and syne I'll gang to bed."

He read the chapter, as was his custom every night, and then closing the Bible he bade them good night.

When the door closed on him, Robin cast a quick glance at his wife. She would surely tell him now. But no: she went on making preparations for retiring without showing the least symptom of a disposition to refer to the matter which was uppermost in his thoughts and beginning to worry him sorely.

"I suppose there's been naebody here speiring for me the day?" he said by and by, thinking that he would help her by giving her an opportunity to tell who had been there.

She had been crossing the room to a little

basket in which she kept her knitting, and as he spoke she paused.

“No, there’s been naebody speiring for ye,” she answered slowly.

She took her knitting and seated herself by the fire opposite him. He looked steadily at the fire.

“Naebody ava?”

“Naebody.”

He was puzzled. Surely if Falcon had come to the house she would have said so now? Was it possible that Falcon, having learned that she was married, had been enraged and determined not to visit her? That was a hopeful thought: it would be so much better for them all that old memories should not be stirred to their depths as they would be by a meeting.

He looked at her again, and the hope was damped. Why was her expression so sad—so like what it had been the first time he had seen her after the false news came of

Falcon's death—if she had neither seen nor heard of him?

“You're no looking sae weel as you were when I gaed awa' this morning,” he said.

She felt his fond earnest eyes were on her, and her lip quivered slightly in spite of every effort she made to control her countenance. Would she tell him why? No; not yet: wait till she was stronger, and could speak calmly of the event.

“I haena been very weel a' day,” she responded quietly.

“What's been like the matter wi' ye?”

“Oh, naething particular, just a kind o' sickishness. Dinna fash yoursel' about it. I'll be weel again the morn.”

“Ye maun get weel, guidwife” (fondly, and laying his hand softly on her head), “I canna do without ye, and I couldna live if I was to lose ye—hoots, what am I haverin' about; I canna lose ye—I maunna lose ye.”

The great passion of the man shone in his

eyes, and was heard in the exceeding tenderness of his voice. It troubled her; for somehow it called up Jeamie's sad face to her mind's eye, although she answered smiling—

“How should ye lose me, guidman? I'm no like to dee.”

“Na, ye'll see me hame, I hope and expect—But, Jeanie lass, I'm a doitered auld body——”

“I'll no let ye say that,” she interrupted, shaking her head at him, and trying hard to look happy and as if nothing troubled her; “ye're my guidman, and I'm no gaun to hae him misca'ed even by himsel'.”

His visage glowed with pleasure.

“Aye, weel, guidwife, we'll let that flee stick to the wa'. But whiles I get notions o' things that micht happen, but never will happen; and at thae times I like to hear ye saying ower and ower again that ye're happy, and that I do a' ye would like me to do or wish me to do to make ye sae.”

She put down her knitting, rose and placed her arms round his neck, resting her head on his shoulder.

“Ye hae done everything that a kind guid heart could do to make me and mine happy. Ye hae done mair nor ae man o’ a thousand would hae done—far mair than I deserve—”

“Whisht ye noo; ye’re my guidwife, and I’ll no hae her misca’ed,” and he laughed loud and cheerily at this turn of her own words, forgetting the Laird, Falcon, and all.

“And while I live,” she went on without changing her position, “I’ll ay try to prove to ye that I’m grateful, and that I gie ye a’ my heart as far as I hae it to gie.”

“And—and ye’re no sorry?”

“For what?”

“That ye married me?”

The question stung her to the quick. How was she to answer? *Was* she sorry? She thought of all his goodness, all his devotion: she thought of how much more

they were worthy than of any sacrifice she could make—and in spite of James Falcon, in spite of the sharp pain she was enduring at this moment on his account, she answered firmly, meeting his yearning gaze with unfaltering eyes—

“No, Robin, I’m no sorry, gin you be happy—I never will be sorry.”

At that he kissed her.

“Eh, Jeanie, woman, but it makes me glad to hear ye say that; it gies me a kind o’ satisfaction that naebody could understand to ken that ye’re content. That would be the darkest day o’ my life, the day I should hear ye say ye wished ye had never been married.”

“But ye shall never hear me say that.”

She spoke truly according to her resolution—according to her belief—that he would never hear her express regret, or feel by any act of hers that she could regret, although all the time her heart was fluttering with the thought of the misery that might have been

spared two people if she had not been a wife.

“Thank ye, lass, I hope no: ill as it micht hae been to bear twa or three month syne, it would be waur noo, and every day that we’re thegither makes the possibility o’t the mair terrible. Folk say that marriage cools love; but that’s no true wi’ us, for ilka day makes ye the mair precious to me. Aye, Jeanie, every day ye live ye grow dearer and dearer to me. I seem to hae got an extra liking for the house noo, jist because ye dwal in’t; and I amaist love the ground just because ye walk on’t. I wouldna cared a button about leaving the farm afore we were married; but I couldna thole to quit the place noo, just because I hae been so happy wi’ you in’t.”

“Ye’ll make me a vain wifie gin ye gang on flatterin’ me that gate, as though we were lad and lass.”

“And so we are and will ay be; and it’s

no flattery ava, but just what I feel. Sae ye may be vain or no as ye like. Od, I forgot, and talking o' vanity minds me o't: I bought ye something the day."

With some labour he produced from the depths of a capacious pocket of his trousers a small parcel, the paper covering of which he carefully removed, and displayed an enormous brooch.

"There," he exclaimed, fastening it on her breast and regarding it admiringly; "it's a bigger ane nor the banker's guidwife's. Ye'll look as grand as the best o' them at the kirk on Sabbath."

Instead of examining the present as she ought to have done, Jeanie placed her hands on her husband's head and looked in his face with a tearful smile on her own.

"Ay thinking o' me, Robin, wharever ye gang," she said tenderly.

"Troth, guidwife, it's even sae; morning, noon, and nicht I'm ay thinking o' ye, and

wonnering what I can do to please ye. Is't no braw?"

"It's ower grand for me, I doubt."

"There's naething ower grand for ye that we can buy and pay for."

All his doubts and fears had for the present vanished; he had even forgotten the existence of Falcon. Nor did he think of him again until the noon of next day, when Adam, coming back from the shore, where he had been to look after his boat, told him that Clashgirn had passed him on the road.

The reference to the Laird recalled everything. But he could think of what he had heard on the previous night with indifference now.

"Did he speak?" queried Robin carelessly.

"Aye, he just said guid day, and speired how we were a' doing, and he said he was gaun ower the hills to Askaig."

"He didna say onything mair?"

"No a word."

“He didna mention Jeames Falcon?”

“Na; there was naething to bring the pair chield up atween us.”

Robin moved away whistling. Evidently Adam knew nothing of the reported return of Falcon; and surely he would have known of it if the lad had been at Cairnieford. Clearly the Laird had been mistaken in that part of his information, or, what was quite probable, had told a lie for the purpose of annoying him.

Was it not possible that the whole story was a lie, and that Falcon had not returned at all? It was possible; but then the Laird had never been caught in such a direct falsehood before; and certainly there was something queer in Jeanie's expression.

He watched her—not because he doubted her in the least—but because he loved her, and every change of look or manner was of interest to him, that he might know the cause, and if possible remove it.

He discovered nothing, however, save that she seemed even more anxious than before, if that were possible, to serve him and please him; and that at odd moments she would be abstracted with a shade on her face as of some troublesome thought. If he spoke to her at these moments she would start and eagerly attend to him as if desirous of removing any impression her manner might have made, and to avoid questioning. But she never made the least reference to Falcon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

“On peace and rest my mind was bent,
And, fool I was, I married.”—*Old Song.*

Thinking and thinking over all these circumstances, Robin became curious to know whether or not there was any truth in the Laird's information, and two days afterwards, when he happened to meet Girzie Todd on her road to the house, he questioned her.

Girzie seemed to be a little taken aback; at any rate she was slow to answer, and that was a rare occurrence with her. This was the reason. She had come to prepare Jeanie for the surprise of Falcon's return, but she had been an hour too late. She had, however, readily agreed to say nothing about the matter to Robin in the event of meeting him. Consequently, she was at a loss now to know

how much she might reveal without betraying the arrangement she had made with Jeanie.

“Wha tauld ye o’t?” she asked, instead of answering him.

“Clashgirn.”

“Aye, it’s true”—(she understood now).

“Hae ye seen the lad?” said Robin, somewhat uncharitably disappointed to discover that the Laird had spoken truly.

“I saw him the nicht he came back.”

“I wonder he doesna come our length. I’m sure we’d be glad to see him.”

“Aye, Cairnieford, sae ye micht be, for it’s easy to him that wins to forgi’e, but it’s no sae easy to him that loses.”

“True enuch, Girzie. But I think if I was to hae a quiet chat wi’ him he micht be persuaded to bear nae ill-will onyway. Do ye ken whar he is?”

“He is someway about, but I couldna exactly say whar he may be the noo.”

She had no very definite reason for giving this evasive answer. She knew very well that he was at Askaig, for Wattie, who had taken a special fancy to Falcon since he had told him about the big ship and the guns, had almost for the first time in his life mustered courage to quit his mother, and had trudged over the hills alone to Askaig every day to gratify his curiosity by listening to Falcon's stories of the wonders he had seen. He was there now, for Falcon, solitary and miserable, was glad even of the poor natural's company and friendship, especially as Wattie's affection for Jeanie made him ready to speak of her often, and to tell all he knew of what had passed before and since her marriage.

It was a sort of consolation to the unhappy man to hear again and again of the circumstances which had placed an impassable barrier between him and the woman he loved. He persuaded himself that the more he heard of them, the more clearly the fact of the in-

evitable separation was presented to him, and that he was thereby schooling himself to think calmly of the irrevocable.

Girzie had been at first doubtful about permitting Wattie to venture so far from her alone; but as she had seen that his pride in his own achievement was rapidly giving him a self-confidence he had never before possessed, she was well pleased to let him go, for she knew that some day—far distant she hoped for his sake—he would have to stand alone.

She was enabled to form a pretty correct notion of Falcon's condition from the gossip of her son, and in evading Robin's question the only idea she had was that a visit from him would not be favourably received by Falcon in his present humour, and that she would not be the means of stirring up more strife to add to Jeanie's distress.

"Better let sleeping dogs lie," she said as she moved on to the house.

There she obtained an opportunity of whispering to Jeanie that the guidman was aware of Falcon's return. The information rendered her nervous and excited. Robin noticed that and marvelled, whilst his doubts and fears sprung up again with new strength.

She watched him closely, expecting him to speak, and perceived that he was observing her strangely. That increased her excitability, and in proportion his uneasiness grew. But neither touched upon the matter that was uppermost in their thoughts, each fearing to pain the other. The result was a general feeling of discomfort without any very distinct or palpable cause that might have been seized and grappled with.

The following day was Sabbath, cold, bleak, and windy, the ground carpetted with frost-crusted snow. The sense of depression was still upon them as they proceeded to the kirk, and filled them with vague forebodings of something about to happen.

During the sermon Robin saw the Laird glancing frequently toward him with curious eyes. As they rose at the end of the service the Laird made a movement with his hand; it was very slight, but Robin thought that it was intended as a signal that he wanted to speak to him.

Little as he cared for McWhapple's conversation at ordinary times, he was eager to learn where Falcon was and what he was doing; and so was quite ready to wait for the Laird. Out in the kirkyard as usual he lingered exchanging greetings with his neighbours, whilst Jeanie walked on with old Mrs. Dunbar.

The Laird joined him immediately, and taking him by the arm mysteriously led him apart from the others.

"The guidwife's no looking very weel?" he said compassionately, glancing over his shoulder at her standing by the gate with Mrs. Dunbar.

"No, she hasna been a'thegither richt this twa or three days; but it's naething particular, just a bit cauld."

"Aye, aye, just that; this twa or three days; ye mean since Tuesday?"

Robin quietly released his arm from the Laird's grasp and looked him steadily in the face.

"Since Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, it doesna matter which o' the days it was," he said calmly. "I'm no sae particular about thae things as ye are, McWhapple, because I canna see that it does a man ony guid—or a woman either for that matter—to be ay looking for a storm in the face o' the sun."

"Just that, just that, I agree wi' ye; but he's a gowk that would put to sea in a punt when the clouds are darkening ower the sun."

"Maybe sae; but ye wanted to say something. Say it and let me awa'."

"Oh, I was merely gaun to mention that

my puir frien' Falcon doesna seem just richt in the head since he saw your guidwife. I wanted him to gang awa' at once, but he's lingering about the place in spite o' my advice, for what end Heaven kens."

"Whar is he biding? No wi' you?"—(controlling voice and features as well as he could that they might not show any of the emotion he felt).

"No, he wouldna bide wi' me; I wish he had, for then I maybe would hae had some command over him. But he would gang awa' whar there would be naebody to see him, or jalouse what he micht be about."

"Whar is he?" (doggedly).

"Up by at Askaig—ye ken he had ay a notion o' the place. I hae been up to see him twa or three times, but I can mak' naething o' him."

"I'll gang ower the morn and see what I can make o' him"—(drily, and turning away).

"You!" (detaining him); "michty! no, ye

maunna do that. Guid kens what would happen atween ye, for, puir lad, I'm feared his head's a wee thing touched."

And the Laird took a snuff, with violent nasal accompaniment expressive of grief.

"A' the mair reason that I should see him, and try to mend the wrang he thinks I hae done him."

"Mercy on us, man! ye'll just drive him wud a'thegither."

The Laird seemed to be really agitated for once in his life.

"We'll see."

"Ye maunna gang near him"—(following him).

"I'll be wi' him the first thing the morn's mornin'."

"It'll be the death o' ane o' ye."

"It'll aiblins be life to him."

Under an exterior of calm resolution, Robin concealed his emotion from all, save the anxious eyes of his wife. She had seen

him speaking to the Laird, and she would have instinctively divined the subject of their conversation, even if it had not been indicated by the sad and thoughtful expression of her husband's face, and the wistful glances with which he regarded her.

Sad he was; for the Laird's description of Falcon's condition, although not intended to produce that effect, impressed him with the idea that he had unintentionally done an irreparable wrong, and he was anxious to make what recompense might be in his power.

Yet he did not speak of the matter to Jeanie; but he purposed doing so for all their sakes immediately after having seen Falcon, when he would be able to relieve her mind of any distress on his account by giving her the result of their interview.

CHAPTER XIX.

ASKAIG.

“Come, winter, with thine angry howl,
And raging, bend the naked tree;
Thy gloom will soothe my cheerless soul,
When nature all is sad like me.”—*Burns*.

In the dull gray light of the succeeding morning Robin was riding on his way to Askaig. He was obliged to ride at a leisurely pace, for the ground was slippery, glistening under a hard frost. As the road was all up hill, it became the more difficult for Jean, surefooted cannie brute as she was, to proceed steadily.

The pace fretted the rider's temper; for he was impatient to reach his destination; and at every stumble of the mare he jerked the bit in a fashion to which Jean's mouth

was wholly unaccustomed, uttering angry ejaculations at the same time.

He had left home without the least hint to any one as to whither he was going. He had merely said to Jeanie that he expected to be home in time for dinner. As it was the first occasion on which he had omitted to tell all about the object of his going forth, and as she was quickened to a perception of the least variation in his manner, she noticed the omission, and wondered at it uneasily.

It was a bleak journey through the mist; with hills and dales lying in their white silent shroud, and the trees which here and there belted the road, or hung over the brow of a glen, rising like gaunt ghosts of themselves. The only sounds he heard were those of the wind sweeping along in keen biting blasts, and the muttering of the burn, which, swollen by the snow, rolled black and noisily down the glens. A few cots of farm-workers

lying so low by the roadside that under the snow they were scarcely distinguishable as anything more than a hillock until he was close to them, and a farm-steading lying a quarter of a mile off the road, were the only habitations between Cairnieford and Askaig.

The road followed the devious course of the burn, generally in sight of it, sometimes rounding a hill and losing it, but always returning to the black line.

Half a mile of the road was a species of broad ledge, having been cut on the hip of a high mountain, the shoulders and head of which towered above the traveller on one side, whilst on the other there was a steep slope down to the bed of the stream. Only sheep and the shepherds' dogs could obtain footing on this slope.

Again the road suddenly dipped down to the burn, which it became necessary to ford to continue the journey. This was a simple affair on ordinary occasions, foot-passengers

crossing easily on three large stepping-stones, whilst a horse would scarcely have been wet above the knees. But when rain had fallen in any quantity, the burn rose to the proportions of a turbulent river; the water dashed down from the hills with the violence of a cataract, seeming to gather strength and volume at the ford, rendering it frequently impassable for several days to man or beast. Repeatedly sheep and cattle which had missed their footing had been swept away by the force of the current as if they had been straws.

The power of the spate was attested by the form of the hill on the side to which Robin was journeying. From the edge of the burn it rose curving inward in the shape of a bow—the whole side of the hill having been undermined and washed away. This was known as the Brownie's Bite, from the supposed resemblance to the impression that would have been left if some monster's jaws

had closed upon the scarp of the hill and bitten it out.

On the height above there was a considerable extent of table-land, which formed the chief arable ground of the farm of Askaig. The steading itself overlooked the abyss; standing within fifty yards of the brink. It was a small squat house, with rough stone walls of a slate colour and thatched roof. It contained three apartments, a kitchen, a sitting-room, and a small bedroom. There was a garret which was reached by a ladder through a trap in the ceiling of the kitchen, but it was only used for storing bags, boxes, and lumber of any sort. The byre, stable, and pig-stye formed one long wooden erection, painted with tar, whilst a similar erection opposite served as barn and cart-shed. The out-buildings stood close to the house, and on the side farthest from the lip of the Brownie's Bite.

Although the burn was swollen when

Cairnieford reached it, he had no difficulty in crossing. The road then made a half circle round the hill, ascending to the stead-ing. At the best Askaig was a cold solitary-looking place, perched on its eyrie above the deep gully surrounded by the solemn quietude of the hills. But under present circumstances it seemed especially dreary. The dull monotony of the snow lay upon everything, and the hills looked down on it with frowning heads of mist. No smoke ascended from the chimneys to indicate that the house was habited. The barn-yard was vacant of the yellow stacks of grain, which reflect warmth, and colour, and sense of plenty on a farmer's home. Portions of the outbuildings had fallen into disrepair; and an old plough, a broken harrow, and a cart-wheel, strewn about with various other disabled implements partially buried in the snow, imparted an aspect of desolation and ruin to the place.

Since Falcon's departure the buildings had been left to take care of themselves. Formerly he had kept them in neat repair, looking forward to the day when he should be able to bring Jeanie there to make a happy home. But the Laird had been too eager to make the most of the land to pay any heed to the steading. The man who had charge of the place, and now lived in the house, had only been installed within a few weeks, and had not yet had time to repair the damage neglect had wrought during the previous year.

"Weel, he's made choice o' a lonely enuch place to hide himsel' in," thought Robin as he approached the house, and observed with all the dissatisfaction of an energetic man the dilapidated state of affairs. "I wonder the Laird doesna let the farm. He'd make mair o't nor he's like to do if things gang on this gate. Aye, aye, and puir Jeamie thought that this was to be his hame and

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hers. It looks just like himsel'—wrecked and ruined."

He gazed wistfully about him as if he had some share in the wreck; and then setting his teeth firmly—

"But, wi' Heaven's help, we'll mend matters yet; and when he's working hard and prospering he'll forget his disappointment. He's no the first by mony a ane that's had to get ower the same fash, and has done well tae. I'm mista'en in the chiel' if he hasna common sense enuch to help himsel' when he sees that there's nae other way for't."

Before he had reached the door it was flung open, and the man in charge appeared. Cairnieford knew him—Rob Keith, or Lang Rob, as he was called, and who, having won the gartens at the marriage of Robin Gray, had proved his worthiness of the victory by taking a wife to himself within two months after.

Lang Rob's mouth was at this moment

full of bannock, for he had been breakfasting on bannock and milk when he had observed from the window the unexpected visitor, and had rushed out to welcome him.

“Guid mornin’ to ye, Cairnieford,” he cried heartily, although somewhat indistinctly; and then gulping down the mouthful, “wha in a’ the world would hae expected to see ye here. Losh, it does ane’s e’en guid to see a human cratur’ in this out-o’-the-way quarter, for there’s naething but dumb beasts to speak till frae morn tae nicht, and ye may guess that’s no the maist pleasing conversation, seeing that it’s a’ on ae side; and naething in’t to warm ye, barrin’ whan ye get a chance o’ damnin’ ane o’ the stupid brutes for tum’-lin’ ower a crag.”

“Ye hae your guidwife, Rob,” said Cairnieford, dismounting and securing the rein to the iron ring by the lintel of the door.

“Oo, aye, whan she’s at hame; but she gaed awa’ doon to her folk at the Port on Sabbath

and she'll no be hame afore Wansday or Thursday, and there's no a spoonfu' o' het porridge till she comes back, for I canna be fashed making't mysel'. Hoo's a' your folk doon by?"

"A' weel, thank ye; but you're no your lane, are ye? I thought Jeames Falcon was wi' ye?"

"Oo, aye, he's bidin' here the noo, but ane nicht as weel hae the wooden Hielander frae the snuff-shop at the Port for a' the company he is. I dinna think he's spoken sax words to me since he cam'."

"When was that?"

"Wansday nicht last when the snaw began. Daft Wattie Todd's been up wi' him every day since syne, and the twa gang daunering about, or sitting ben the house there i' the cauld, just as though they were baith crack; an' deed I dinna ken but Wattie's the mair sensible o' the twa, for ane can get a friendly word out o' him whiles, if ye just speak

kindly to him an' treat him like ither folk; but ye canna get mair nor aye or no frae Falcon, try as ye will. He's no like himsel' ava, for he used to be a blithe eneuch chiel'."

All this was confirmation of McWhapple's statements; and if he had been truthful in this respect, was it not probable that he had also been truthful in telling him that Falcon had been at Cairnieford? Yet Jeanie had said nothing of his visit!

"Is he ben the house enoo?"

"Him? Did ye want to see him?"

Lang Rob had made no reference to the cause to which he attributed the change in Falcon; but he had been thinking of it for all that, and thinking too that there would likely be a fine toulzie between Jeanie's guidman and Jeanie's lad if they happened to meet. Therefore, he was astonished by Robin's question, and still more by the answer to his own.

"That was what I came here for. Is he in?"

“Na, he gaed out this morning before daylight. I heard him openin’ the door, and thocht he’d be back afore breakfast time ony-way, but he’s never come yet that I ken o’, but I’ll look to make sure.”

He turned into the house, and Robin followed him. They entered the parlour—the apartment which Falcon occupied. It had even a more cheerless aspect than the exterior of the house. The floor and walls were bare and damp-looking. Lang Rob and his wife only used the kitchen even when they had the house to themselves. The ashes of a fire lay on the hearth, but there was no warmth in them now, and they seemed almost to make the room look colder by suggesting the fire which ought to have been there in that season to give any comfort to the occupant.

As for furniture there was nothing but three wooden chairs, a table, and the bed made in a recess in the wall with a door like a cupboard. The bed-clothes were lying

tossed in a heap as they had been left when Falcon had risen.

“He’s no here, onyway,” said Lang Rob, crossing the room, his head almost touching the low ceiling.

He looked into the little chamber, the door of which stood at the opposite side of the parlour.

“And he’s no there.”

Robin glanced into the apartment; it was empty, and had evidently not been used for some time.

“When is he likely to come back?” he asked, standing in the centre of the cheerless parlour gazing thoughtfully round him.

“Guid kens. Whiles he gangs out in the mornin’ an doesna come back till after dark, and whiles he’s back afore ye would think he had time to rin round the steadin’. Will ye bide a wee an’ see if he comes?”

“Aye, I may as weel, noo that I’m here.”

“Come awa, then, an’ I’ll let ye see the cattle. We hae gotten twa or three rale braw stots.”

Whereupon they proceeded to the byre, Lang Rob forgetting all about his lodger’s circumstances and oddities, in his interest in the cattle under his charge, and glib commendation of their various good qualities. His tongue rattled on unceasingly, as if he were eager to make the most of the rare opportunity of an appreciative listener.

Cairnieford had waited two hours, as the dial of his big silver watch, which he pulled up from the depths of his fob, informed him, and still Falcon had not appeared.

“He’s maybe down at Clashgirn,” he said then.

“He micht be. The Laird’s been up twa’r three times to see him, and aiblins he’s gaen doon there the day, no to haud the Laird ay travellin’ back and fore.”

“I’ll gang and see, onyway. But if I

shouldna find him, tell him frae me that I'll be up on Wednesday mornin', and that I maun see him."

"I'll tell him."

"I'd come up the morn again," Cairnieford proceeded as he mounted Jean; "but I hae to gang to the market, and as I hae baith to lift and pay some siller, I canna just put it aff."

"Ye'll aiblins see my guidwife when ye're in the toon the morn, and if ye do just tell her to come awa' hame directly, for I canna manage without her; and if she doesna come—od, I think I'll loup ower the Brownie's Bite to spite her."

"I'm thinking there wouldna be mony hale banes in your body by the time ye wan to the foot. But I'll tell your guidwife."

Lang Rob accompanied him as far as the ford, and there he looked anxiously up and down the glen at the swollen burn.

"'Deed, if she doesna come hame the morn,

she'll no be able to win ower for a week. It looks like rain, and if it comes a sudden doon-pour wi' a' that snaw lying on the hills, there'll be sic a spate as hasna been for a while."

Robin rode away disappointed and thoughtful. His impatience was subdued by a sense of depression which he could not overcome, and which he could only attribute to his sorrow on Falcon's account. The more he heard of him the more anxious he became to amend so far as he might the wrong he had unwittingly done him.

At Clashgirn he learned that the Laird had been out since breakfast time, and had left word that he would not be home till late if he returned at all that night, which was doubtful, as he was going to Ayr.

"Has Falcon been here?" he asked.

"Na; he hasna been ance here since Wednesday last, though he kens hoo I would like to see him and hear a' about his travels," answered Mrs. Begg.

Robin was disappointed again, but he had nothing for it save to turn homeward. He wondered if McWhapple had taken Falcon away purposely to prevent their meeting.

“The auld fule,” he muttered angrily, “as if he thought I couldna keep my temper. Maybe, though, it’s no me he’s feared for. Toots, Jeames Falcon canna be sae spited against me that he winna listen to reason. I’ll no believe that till I see him mysel’.”

The rain had begun by the time he started for the market next morning. It was only a light drifting shower; but the clouds were loaded and black, and Adam predicted a heavy fall.

The prediction was fulfilled by the afternoon, for when Robin quitted the town on his way home, the rain was falling in a thick heavy shower, and the earth was rapidly blackening under the dissolving snow. It was a steady pour, and when Robin reached home the burn was roaring down the glen,

swollen to a torrent, and rising to within a few yards of the steading.

He was drenched to the skin when he dismounted at the door, and gave Jean to the lad who appeared from the kitchen, to lead her to the stable.

He entered the house, calling to Jeanie to get him a change of clothes, and wondering indeed that she had not as usual met him at the door. The lamp was already lit in the room, but there was nobody to meet him except Adam, who regarded him with amaze.

“Jeanie?” he said. “She’s out.”

“Send some o’ them to tell her I’m come hame, then. She can leave the kye to the lassies.”

“But she’s no at the byre,” said Adam, opening his eyes; “she gaed out three hours syne or mair, and I unnerstood she was gaun to meet you.”

“To meet me? What for?”

“She said there was a message come that

ye had gotten yoursel' hurt, and that she was to gang to ye at ance, and maybe wouldna be hame the nicht. She was in an unco state about it, and just took a bundle o' things that she thocht she would need, and gaed awa' wi' the chiel' that brought the news."

"Wha could tell that lee? Gaed awa'—whar to?"

"We were a' sae muckle confused that she forgot to say, and I forgot to speir, for she wasna twa minutes in getting ready."

Robin summoned every man and woman about the place, and questioned them excitedly. But none of them could give any information as to whither their mistress had gone, or who had been the messenger who had come for her. One of the women, however, had noticed that "she was greeting, and looked sair frichted."

That was all he could learn, for the messenger had arrived during the dinner-hour, when the folk were all in doors.

“Whar’s the loon?” cried Robin, looking about.

The “loon” was the boy who had taken Jean to the stable, and who opportunely returned as his master asked for him.

The question was put to him—had he seen his mistress going away?

“Aye, I was ower by the plantin’ for the wood that was cut yesterday, and I saw her gaeing awa’ in a gig wi’ a man. The gig was waiting at the foot of the road, an’ the man asked me to haud the horse, and gied me a penny.”

“Gig? What gig?”

“I dinna ken, but I think it was the Clashgirn gig.”

“Clashgirn!”

Robin’s hand went up to his head to try and steady himself to think. Clashgirn’s gig! Was it some trick that was being played upon him? Was McWhapple trying to ruin him? He had spite enough for that, not-

withstanding all his professions of friendship. But no, no, what could he want with Jeanie?

“What way did the gig gang?” he demanded hoarsely.

“It gaed up by the hill road,” answered the boy.

The hill road—Askaig—James Falcon—flashed through the husband’s mind with the fiery swiftness of lightning, burning and maddening him.

“Saddle Brown Jock,” he shouted, whilst men and women, unable to divine the cause of his excitement, stared at him with open eyes and mouths.

“Brown Jock!” ejaculated the cattleman; “he hasna been out thir twa days, an’ he’s as wild as a stallion. There’s no ane o’ us daur gang near him wi’ a bridle, let alane a saddle. Ye canna mean him.”

“I said Brown Jock—daumn ye, do ye no hear what I say?”

But without waiting for answer or giving

any of them time to obey, he rushed furiously from the house himself and down to the stable.

“He’s gaen gyte,” exclaimed the cattleman, who acted as Robin’s grieve; “the horse ’ll fell him if he touches him. After him, lads, and stop him.”

The men ran down to the stable, but to their amazement they found the master busy buckling the girths round Brown Jock, the saddle already on the animal’s back.

Without a word to any of them, but with frenzied haste he completed the fastening of the saddle, and with singular adroitness slipped the bridle over the horse’s head and the bit into his mouth, drawing the snaffle tight.

Brown Jock was a powerful horse, with great fierce eyes and restive ears that tokened an unmanageable spirit. The moment he was led outside the stable he began to caper furiously, splashing the slush that

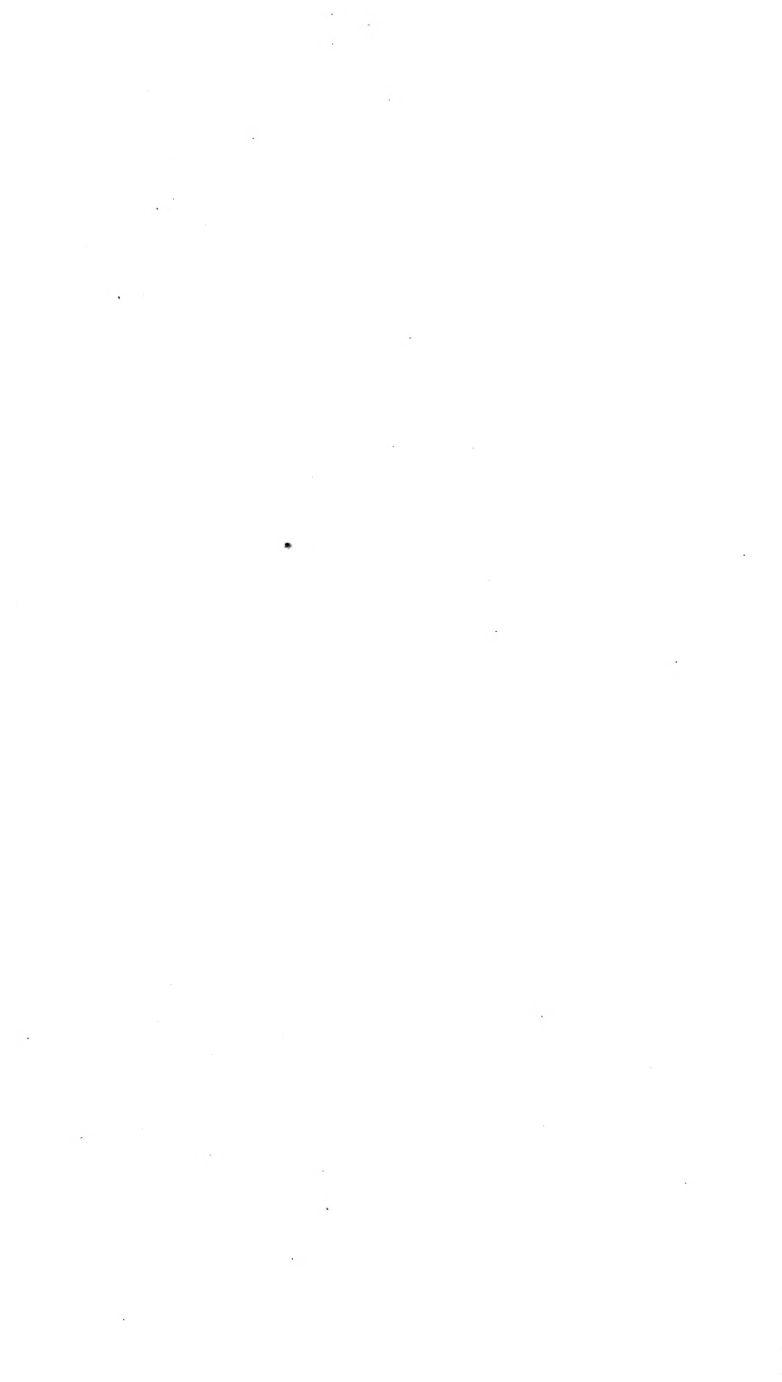
was lying in pools on the ground about the onlookers.

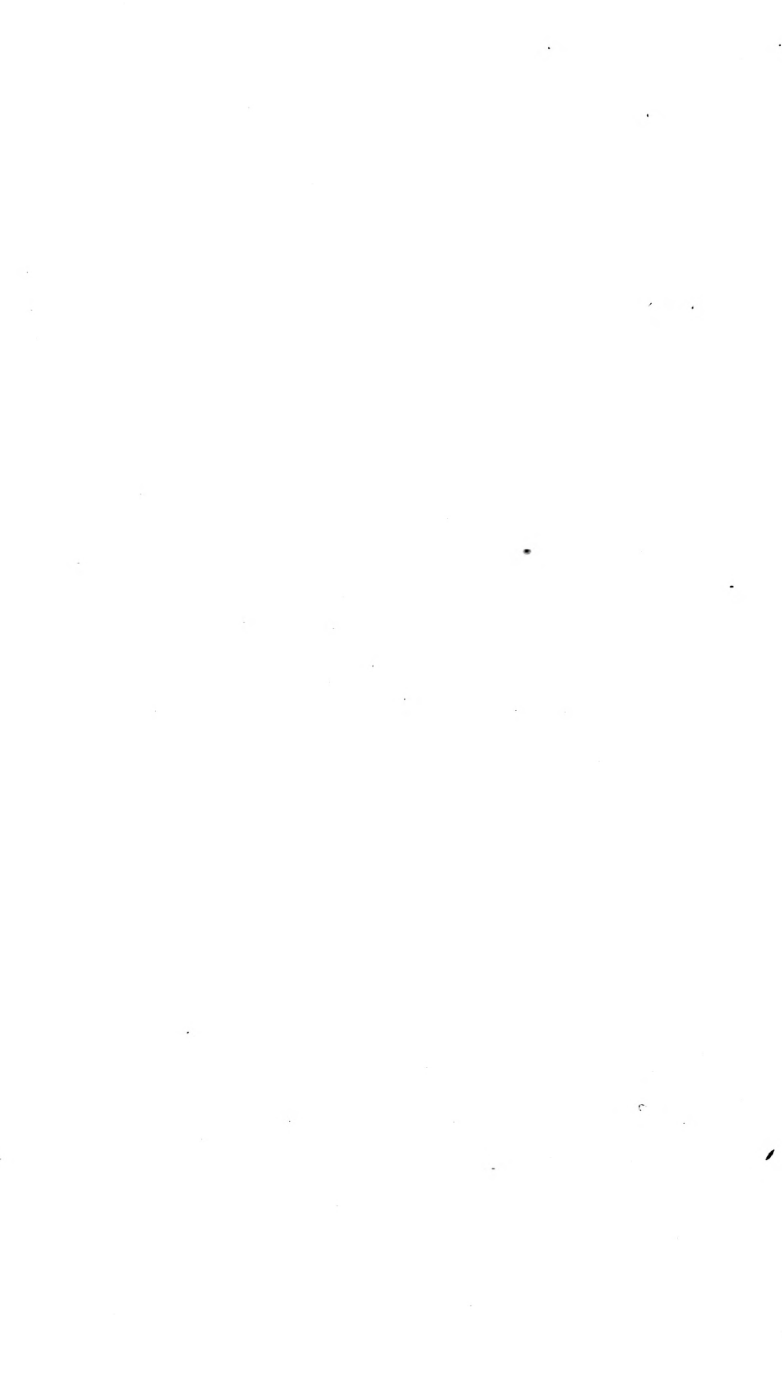
“For guidsake, master, mind what ye’re about,” cried the grieve alarmed.

Setting his teeth hard and griping the reins short, Robin flung himself on the saddle.

The horse, startled by the sudden weight that pressed upon him, gave one furious bound forward that almost unseated the rider, and then dashed off at a mad pace down the road, followed by shouts of alarm from the wondering men.

END OF VOL. 1.





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